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LEON BLUM

Man and Statesman

LEON BLUM

MAN AND STATESMAN

by

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AND
THADEE NATANSON

THE ONLY AUTHORISED BIOGRAPHY

LONDON
VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD
1937

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY PURNELL AND SONS, LTD. (T.U.)
PAULTON (SOMERSET) AND LONDON

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CHAPTER I

THE CHILD LEON: 1872–1881

LEON BLUM WAS born in 1872 in the Saint Denis quarter of Paris, where one may feel the heart of the great city, almost next door to that Faubourg Saint Antoine whence the revolutionary mob set out to storm the Bastille. His parents had lived at 151 rue Saint Denis since their marriage in 1869, with the exception of a few weeks while Paris was a prey to the terrible civil strife known as the Commune. Léon was the second son, but three more were to come in quick succession.

His father, Gustave Blum, who came of Alsatian Jewish stock, was engaged in the wholesale ribbons trade; it was a business that throve on the whole, and allowed the family to live in comfortable circumstances. A shrewd, upright Jewish merchant, loving his business, he was a quiet, modest man, whose authority in the family circle, never having been questioned, did not need to be enforced. From him, Léon inherited but few traits: a passionate love of nature and particularly of flowers, a conciliatory character and an unbounded kindness of

heart. Perhaps one ought to add diplomatic qualities and a certain precision in regard to facts, but certainly no trace of that financial acquisitiveness that is the mark of the successful business man. This commercial sense Gustave Blum possessed to a high degree, and it sometimes led to amusing clashes with his generous impulses. Bargaining had in the course of his business become for him second nature: he used to buy fruit almost daily from a woman who had a stall at the street corner and never failed to beat her down by a few centimes. But when one day the woman told him with a radiant face that her daughter was about to be married, he promptly pulled out a banknote for one thousand francs and gave it to her. All his sons were to inherit from him a tendency to discreet, anonymous but bountiful charity.

The mother exercised a much deeper influence upon the boy's mind and character. Madame Blum was indeed a remarkable woman. Born in Paris, having lived there all her life, she was a somewhat timid person, but with very steady principles, a compound of conservatism and radicalism. In all that related to the family, to tradition, to the strict observance of the rites of the Jewish religion, she was uncompromising. But her mother, Marie Picart, who kept a bookshop on the Place Dauphine, was an ardent revolutionary, and had not only taught her daughter to love books, but had influenced her politically

in a liberal direction, a liberalism that adapted itself to the rules of family morality and to all piously conserved traditions.

Madame Blum's love of truth was almost inconvenient. Neither in herself nor in those around her would she tolerate the slightest prevarication. Such "white lies" as the servant telling an unwished-for visitor that "Madame is not at home", were banned. She could not endure even unspoken lies. Thus on one occasion she fell seriously ill and was taken to the nearest hospital, which happened to be a Roman Catholic one. When she had regained consciousness and found that her attendants were Roman Catholic Sisters of Mercy, she insisted on leaving at once. This was not out of religious intolerance, a sentiment that was quite alien to her, but because she felt that if she stayed on she would, in her general behaviour, have to conform to the Roman Catholic atmosphere and thus act a lie, or else hurt the feelings of the devoted women serving as nurses there.

Another striking characteristic of hers was a sense of justice. This was developed to an abnormal degree. Léon Blum often recollects, not without a smile, but with loving respect, how if she wanted to give pears to two of her boys, she would not be content to give them each one. For one of the pears might be bigger or juicier than the other. So she would cut the two pears in half and give two halves to each boy. A trifle, but highly

characteristic of a profound and logical devotion to justice, which she passed on to her son Léon.

Another faculty the boy inherited from his mother was an amazing memory. We shall see as the story of Léon Blum's life unfolds, how great a part in his success has been due to this memory which age has rather sharpened than blunted, a memory that applies not merely to essential things, but is of universal range. It has, all his life, enabled him to quote at will literally thousands of verses of the poets he had read and loved. It made it again and again possible for the parliamentarian to interject into a debate on some subject quite unexpectedly raised, a correction of some statistical figure cited by an opponent. It led even to the surely unique spectacle of a Prime Minister being able to recite offhand the list of names and pedigrees of all the winners of the Grand Prix since its inception in 1862. Only on very rare occasions does he make an excusable slip of memory. An amusing instance of this occurred in the course of an important debate in the Chamber in May, 1937. An opposition speaker had occasion to quote a Latin verse, and added: "as Juvenal said".

From the ministerial bench, Premier Blum corrected: "No, that is from Lucretius!"

The opposition deputy insisted he was right: "What will you bet?" he asked.

"Anything you like," replied Blum.

"The fate of your cabinet?"

Blum laughingly nodded, adding: "Let Herriot be the arbiter."

Edouard Herriot, himself an erudite classical scholar, was presiding over the Chamber. With a tragi-comical gesture he veiled his face with his hands, and, in his deep resounding voice, said: "Then I am afraid the cabinet is beaten!" Whereupon the whole house roared with laughter.

But this is the exception that proves the rule. Blum's marvellous memory has very rarely played him false.

Besides his father and mother, another member of the family played a part in influencing the child. This was a married sister of M. Gustave Blum, Madame Katz. Much younger than Madame Blum, she used often to be taken for her daughter. Having no children of her own, she made her nephews the object of her maternal instincts. A pretty little woman, very intelligent, humorous and sprightly, she added a great deal to the gaiety of their home.

On the whole, then, this was no household of extraordinary happenings, but it was well designed to exert a formative, steadying influence. The father's quietness and good nature, the mother's adherence to well-defined principles, were not such as to provide exuberant outlets for the wealth of tenderness that was part and parcel of Léon's nature. "Honour thy father and mother" was the motto that ruled unchallenged. It fostered deference and respect, a sense of security and justice, rather than demonstrative affection. Madame Katz,

"Aunt Ernestine", was probably the first grown-up person to open the floodgates of the boy's stores of affection. He loved her neither less nor better than he did his parents, but he loved her differently. To obey her was effortless.

Léon Blum's relations with his parents were never troubled by the slightest cloud. Never did a day pass, after he had left the paternal home to found one of his own, that he did not call upon his parents. Gustave Blum lived to the ripe age of eighty. After his death in 1921, every year with the single exception of 1936, when a fast and furious electoral campaign was on, Léon Blum never failed upon the anniversary of the sad day to go to the synagogue with his brothers in pious homage to his father's memory.

This is probably the only remnant left him of his strict, early Jewish upbringing. The faith of his fathers has long ceased to have any but a traditional meaning for him. And when he left his mother's household, where nothing but Jewish dishes, prepared according to Jewish rites, were served, he left behind him all those Jewish observances that had been there so strictly enforced. Yet something has remained of this early atmosphere: a deep-seated attachment to, a conscious pride in, the great traditions of the Jewish race, and a profound sympathy with it in its hours of trial and tribulation.

Home life in the rue Saint Denis, so far as little Léon was concerned, was not greatly complicated

by ill health. At the age of three months, when such a disease is often fatal, he had whooping cough, and his parents passed through an anxious time. But that was the one and only illness he had either in childhood or in manhood. Though not exactly robust looking, and of an undoubtedly nervous disposition, he seems to have that iron constitution, that resistance to fatigue and worries as well as to actual disease, that is perhaps the most priceless gift to a statesman.

Léon Blum was born at a time when Paris was passing through a period of storm and stress. The war of 1870–71 had been fought and lost. Big slices of French territory were still occupied by Prussian garrisons. National pride had been deeply humiliated. But more poignant than the memories of defeat were those of the Commune, that insurrection of the common people that had been smothered in blood. The city was dotted with blackened ruins of historic edifices that the rulers delayed in repairing because they wanted them to remain as terrible mementoes and warnings. Some had been burned down in savage excesses by a mob that had not learned the lesson of self-discipline. Others, perhaps, were the first instance in modern history of the provocative kind of incendiarism of which the burning of the Reichstag in 1933 stands as supreme example. A whole people had stood with arms in its hands, with hatred in its heart, on opposing sides of the barricades. Thanks to Bismarck's assistance, the

Commune, after a heroic stand, had been crushed. Thousands upon thousands had been slaughtered in cold-blooded reprisals. Over sixty years were to pass ere it would happen that, under mingled Tricolour and Red flags, ministers of the Republic would stand with bowed heads and fists clenched in salute, in front of that grey wall—the *Mur des Fédérés*, where the blood of revolutionary Paris had ebbed.

Hatred was still alive in the hearts of men. Wounds were still open and bleeding. The terms "*Communard*" and "*Versaillais*" were still being slung backwards and forwards in anger and contempt. Everyone took sides. Triumphant reaction was, as is usually the case, tending to extremes. The Royalists saw their chance. There was a republic, but it was still most insecure; indeed up to 1878 its very existence stood in question.

In the household in the rue Saint Denis politics played no great part; but what politics there were were Republican, definitely to the Left. This was fanned to bright flames as soon as Léon's maternal grandmother, Madame Picart, appeared. She had been left a widow in early life, with two daughters to care for. She had lived from the proceeds of her bookshop on the Place Dauphine where clients abounded from the near-by law courts. A woman of great character and culture, she had two passions in life—poetry and politics. In many ways, even physically, she recalled George Sand, whose firm admirer she was. But her idol was Victor Hugo, the poet and the politician. She it

was who taught Léon reams of Victor Hugo's verses, which he used to recite to the great surprise of his schoolfellows. Madame Picart was a typical daughter of Paris: emotional, patriotic and a born insurgent. She was "red" and made no secret of it. "Had I not had children to look after," she used to say, "I would, with my own hands, have killed Badinguet!"[1]

Hers was the first powerful influence on the child's mind. That mind was developing with singular rapidity. At the age of three he had learned to read while in his mother's arms, watching her teaching his elder brother Lucien to read. When the three younger boys, Marcel (b. 1874), Georges (b. 1875) and René (b. 1876) were able to walk, Madame Blum found her hands too full with five turbulent youngsters. So the two elder, Lucien and Léon, were packed off to a local private school, the Pension Roux.

Léon was not slow in finding his feet in this new young world, or in making his mark: it was the mark of a budding child-prodigy. Precocious children are often a pest to themselves and to their surroundings, and seldom does a child-prodigy in after life fulfill the promise of these early days. In both respects Léon Blum proved to be a conspicuous exception. The affectionate nature showed itself agreeably in his relations at school. He was a popular and charming small boy, eager to please from sheer love of being loved.

[1] The contemptuous popular nickname of Napoleon III.

His unusual memory and love of reading made all work easy to him. He read enormously and precociously. He listened avidly. He observed intently—not merely the trifles of home life or of the school, but even something of the great happenings beyond.

His first visual impression of political events was a gaudily coloured print of "Thiers, the Liberator of French Territory", which, in a first bold attempt at modern publicity, some manufacturer of tapioca had got every grocer's store in Paris to display in the shop-window. Thiers, who in 1873 had been succeeded at the Elysée by the anything but Republican Marshal MacMahon, stood at that time as a symbol of staunch Left policies—a reputation he was to lose irremediably shortly afterwards. Madame Picart was prompt to answer all Léon's questions about the man whose coloured portrait stared at him from the shop windows, and she may be depended upon to have done so in her own radical way.

Republican Thiers' name was in other ways in high favour in the Blum household. Rightly or wrongly he was associated with the prevailing boom in trade. Parisian women began once more to dress elegantly. The fashion was for slim waistlines surmounted by many-coloured clouds of ribbons, satin, velvet and silk. This meant excellent business for M. Gustave Blum, who had called in his brothers and founded the house of Blum

Frères that exists to this day under the management of Léon Blum's brothers.

The boy loved the sight and feel of the ribbons, and the elegant *toilettes* of the women. He would often escape to the Champs Elysées and watch, open-eyed, the smart carriages, prancing horses and luxurious trappings; and come back to the somewhat drab home in the working-class street of Saint Denis, with quaint remarks on his lips. These remarks spoke not of envy, but of vague wonder why this division should be, and why some streets are grey and poor, and others bathed in splendour.

Meanwhile, as the child was growing, Paris and France were evolving. The magic structures of the Third International Exhibition of 1878, the piercing of fine new streets such as the rue de la Paix and the rue de Paris, attracted the sightseers. Thiers died, unwept and unsung by the Republicans he had once led, and his was the first national funeral of the young Republic. New institutions were springing up. There were free universities in 1875, whereas a couple of years before, there had been the conscript army. After a long struggle the Monarchy had succumbed; it was killed by two votes, with no prospect of resurrection. The rancours of the Commune were stilled. The constitutional fight was practically at an end: the acute economic and social fight had hardly begun. The Republic could afford to settle down and put its house in order. In 1879 Jules

Grévy replaced the suspect Marshal-President at the Elysée. This Republican success earned the unusual and unexpected recognition of a letter to the new President from the Prince of Wales who was later, as Edward VII, to seal the entente between Britain and France. Stability was shown by the return to Paris of the Parliament that had, since the Commune, prudently sat in Versailles. Gambetta, the most hotly discussed politician of the day, left his presidential chair in the Chamber to plead—and to impose—the Bill granting full amnesty to the old fighters of the Commune. For the first time, the government of the Republic celebrated the 14th of July, the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, as a national holiday. Old Madame Picart was radiant with joy; her ideas seemed to be borne on the wings of victory.

The boy listened and smiled. Very little of it did he understand, but he felt it deeply. It enveloped him like a comfortable cloud.

At nine he was a bright strip of a lad, lively and full of fun. He was very conscious and proud of his mental superiority over his brothers and his little schoolfellows, but inordinately fond of them. A frankly impertinent small boy, there was nevertheless a charming, disarming way with him. He resented bitterly every attempt at bullying; he was already a little rebel, bowing only to the authority of those he loved. Above all things he was eager to see, to hear, to learn.

One day he ran home after roaming about the streets in the Saint Michel and Sébastopol sections of the city. He had seen carpet merchants from the East, with fezes or turbans on their heads, and heard them chanting their wares. He had somewhere or other picked up the name of "Eastern Quarter" applied to that colourful, somewhat exotic district. And he had caught, in passing, some remark, doubtless passed between two staid citizens over an *apéritif* on some café-terrace, about the "Eastern Question". The wide-awake, childish mind at once connected the two things. "What is the Eastern Question?" he wanted to know.

Doubtless he was told it had to do with foreign wars, and was referred to the drawings of soldiers, Turks and Russians and Rumanians, in strange uniforms, he had gaped at on the newspaper stands and in the bookshop windows. It was not till many years later that he was to understand what this Eastern Question was that dominated world politics at that time. For those were the days of attempted Balkan settlement, and the Congress of Berlin, where the dour, unbending Bismarck stood face to face with Disraeli, one of those great Jews of history, such as those of whom the Bible speaks, whose apparent humility mutes itself into pride as they talk with kings and shape the destinies of empires. It was Disraeli, that romantic, dominant figure, who was to fascinate Léon Blum in after years more perhaps than any other figure in history.

CHAPTER II

THE UNDISCIPLINED STUDENT: 1881–91

YOUNG LEON'S NEXT educational stage was as an inmate of the Pension Kahn, run by "Father" Kahn with the more or less efficient help of his two sons. This was housed in a palatial edifice dating from the seventeenth century, the former habitation of the President of the Paris "Parlement" which, in pre-revolution days was the name given to the supreme court of justice. Parents were always greatly impressed by the imposing exterior, the old-world courtyard, the monumental stone staircase and the finely-appointed reception room. Their feelings would have been modified could they have penetrated into the rooms further back, for the common-room and the dormitories were in a chronic state of neglect and filth. "Father" Kahn, apart from acting as house-master to the boys living in, was supposed to look after the lessons and general behaviour of the day-boys, but the actual schoolwork was not in his province; the older pupils attended the near-by Lycée Charlemagne.

At the Lycée, Léon gave more than complete satisfaction. He outstripped even much older

boys. He carried off prize after prize at the Lycée, so that he was looked upon by "Father" Kahn as a sort of publicity pupil, shedding great glory upon his establishment. For these sound business reasons, Léon was the apple of the eye of "Father" Kahn, but Léon by no means returned the compliment. He hated the man, and he positively loathed the one unkempt, redheaded son of his who was preparing for a professional examination and took special delight in bullying his father's luckless pupils when supervising their home lessons. Léon showed his dislike in biting sarcasm, in downright insolence, in open rebellion.

After a while he could stand it no longer. One night none of the five sons of M. Gustave Blum appeared at home. The anxious father hastened to the Pension Kahn to find out what was the matter. "Father" Kahn was tearing his hair off. "Léon has bolted!" he confessed. "And what of the other four?" They, it appeared, were locked in one of the dormitories; "Father" Kahn was holding them as hostages in fear lest his show-pupil Léon should be taken away from him. After many hours wandering through Paris streets, the errant one turned up, very dusty, very hungry and very blind—for in the course of his peregrinations he had lost his spectacles! No greater calamity than this could befall Léon Blum, who is terribly near-sighted.

In 1885, to his intense relief, he was removed from the Pension Kahn but remained in the Lycée

Charlemagne where, without exerting himself in the least, he continued his amazing prizewinning career. Opinion regarding him was somewhat mixed among his teachers and schoolfellows. Gifted with a genius for repartee, he made ample use of it. People dreaded his irony, his clever impertinence. On the other hand, to those whom he elected to be his friends, he was all charm. There is a beautiful story told of the boy, Mozart: when he was being taken from salon to salon in aristocratic Vienna to show off his musical genius, he used, before going up to the instrument, to ask the lady of the house—duchess or princess of the blood royal though she be—"Do you love me?" If the answer was "yes", the boy Mozart would go to the piano and play. If the answer was negative or evasive, no power on earth could drag one note of music out of him.

The boy Blum was of that same kidney. He would do anything for those whom he loved; and he loved all who loved him.

Love was indeed the only educational method that could be employed in his case. And much love was needed, for he had all the elements for an unbearably conceited youngster, who was no respecter of persons and never hesitated to give voice to his opinions.

The Blum family had meanwhile moved to a spacious apartment overlooking the Boulevard Sébastopol near that delicate masterpiece of architecture, the Saint Jacques tower. There, on the

balcony, many friends had gathered on January 2nd, 1883, to see the funeral procession of Gambetta pass by on its way to the Panthéon. Eleven-year-old Léon expounded in detail and with astonishing accuracy the life and work of the Republican statesman, and did not mince his ridicule for those who showed ignorance or doubt. One who was present on that occasion said later that he was of two minds all the time whether to hug the boy or give him a spanking. That seems to have been the frame of mind of many who came into contact with him, but in nearly every case his smile, his affectionate gestures, his charm, secured the victory.

It was shortly after that his maternal grandmother, Madame Picart, came to live with the Blums. That was for Léon an undiluted joy. She caressed him, fondled him, taught him poetry galore, guided his reading and filled him full with impulsive Radical politics. Her death in the country-house in Enghien where the Blum family spent the summer, was the first keen sorrow of his young life.

Life at home and at school pursued the even tenor of its way. Léon was learning almost without effort, but with amazing rapidity. Perhaps his strongest interest was history, the history of France, of course, but also and very especially that of England. English thought, literature and institutions have, from his early youth onwards, always had a peculiar fascination for him. Greek and

Roman civilisation was another pet subject of reading and study. And above all, literature. He revelled in the classics: Corneille, Racine, La Bruyère, the historian Saint Simon, the last of whom has to this day remained one of his favourite authors. From that devotion to classical authors he undoubtedly derived those qualities of taste, conciseness, clearness and elegance of style that have marked his literary and oratorical output. Among the modern poets Victor Hugo took pre-eminent place. It was indeed a proud day in the boy's life when he, at the age of ten, as one of a deputation from his school, was privileged to visit Hugo in his little house on the Avenue Eylau and offer him the admiring homage of the youth of France on the occasion of his eightieth birthday. Three years later, Léon Blum was chosen one of the representative French schoolboys who bore wreaths behind that lowliest of all hearses in which, at Victor Hugo's express command, the mortal remains of the great poet were driven to the Arc de Triomphe where they were to remain a whole night, before being taken to the Panthéon.

During this period at the Lycée Charlemagne and then at the Lycée Henri IV he formed valuable and lasting friendships. One such was with André Gide, with whom he collaborated to the review *Conque*, edited by pupils of the school under the direction of Pierre Louys. Among the regular contributors were Paul Valéry and Henry

Béranger, who was to become French Ambassador in Washington and President of the Senate's Commission on Foreign Affairs. Some of these names were to make their mark on French literature, though candour compels the admission that their poetic effusions of that time were not particularly brilliant!

In another way, however, this work on the *Conque* was important to Blum, for it led to his frequenting the salon of Hérédia, the exotic poet, author of the *Trophées*, where he met several notable people, among them Anatole France. In the hospitable house of the philologist Bréal he met Renan, but the deepest friendship he formed was with the Berthelot family. René Berthelot was his schoolmate and, owing to their names beginning with the same letter, used generally to sit next to him. The Berthelot family was a remarkable one, and it took Blum to its bosom. The father was that distinguished scientist who was Permanent Secretary of the Academy of Science. A member of the younger generation was that Philippe Berthelot who was to become the right-hand man of Aristide Briand, that great artisan of peace. Professor Berthelot lived in the Institut, and the State had created for him a laboratory outside of Paris at Bellevue. Léon was a most frequent visitor both in the Institut and at Bellevue. No more powerful influence could be imagined than that of this cultured household, prominent in society, in science and in literature. Politics

were less in honour there; they were treated with a sort of good-natured detachment. It was the time when Boulanger, "the handsome general", was beginning to gather around him the reactionary, anti-democratic elements. The movement, though it appeared to most to be pregnant with ruin for Republican institutions, was viewed in the Berthelot circle with half-amused scepticism, which events were to justify. There is extant a letter from André Berthelot to the writer Maurice Barrès that illustrates this. Barrès, who was to become, till the Dreyfus affair, a great friend of Blum's, and who had already built up a sound literary reputation, told André Berthelot that the Boulangists wanted to put him up for election to the Chamber of Deputies and asked him for advice on the matter. The letter in reply concluded: "You would do well to go into politics, for it will give scope to your literary work, and particularly well to go into Boulangist politics, for since that cannot last long, it will soon give you back to literature."

Maurice Barrès at that time had considerable influence on Léon as well as on his elder brother Lucien; and this influence manifested itself in explosive patriotic sentiment. The brothers used to declaim the somewhat cheap patriotic songs of Déroulède, and Léon actually joined one of those School Battalions that, in young imaginations, were to lead the van of French armies to reconquer the lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine.

The Blum family, though living in Paris, is, as we have said, of Alsatian origin, and this Alsatian consciousness has never left Léon Blum. Thus after the war, we find him a leading member of a "Republican League of Alsace-Lorraine". He has always shown particular interest for Alsatian questions, and there is no doubt that this feeling of kinship with the lost and re-won provinces has contributed to building up in him a sound national feeling that he did not betray even when he was a leading member of a so-called "international" party.

The whole of this period in Léon Blum's life can be best described as a steady and swift widening of his horizon. Literature, science, history, politics, social life—these are all windows upon life which he opened wide one after another. There were unexpected windows among them. It was Philippe Berthelot for instance, who introduced him to horse-racing, not as a betting man, but as a student of form and lover of horses. For years he was to write, together with that brilliant humorist Tristan Bernard, the sporting and racing notes in the *Revue Blanche*.

Everything that was human, that was curious, that was alive, interested him. Nothing left him cold. Only one thing roused his hatred: injustice. Any manifestation of this, anything remotely suggesting tyranny, moved him to volcanic anger. He could not bear the idea of oppression; it made him almost physically sick.

So far, however, this only manifested itself in words, in thoughts, in an attitude of mind. There was not the slightest indication that the eager, sensitive, affectionate lad would ever become a political fighter. Nothing pointed to his having a vocation for politics. That he would ever take a part, and a leading part, in the rough and tumble of political life seemed utterly unlikely. He himself in his wildest imaginings did not at that time contemplate anything of the sort.

He was just a young animal—in the intellectual as well as in the physical sense—having a look round the world, drinking it all in, enjoying every new vision, trying out every new sensation, recording every new idea. And, on the whole, finding life an extraordinarily stimulating thing.

In this frame of mind he entered the Ecole Normale. There is no exact equivalent for this educational institution in England or America. But it may be said that, just as for generations the ruling statesmen of England came out of Eton and Oxford, for instance, so for over a hundred years the leading professors, thinkers, many distinguished high civil servants and diplomats, in France, have come out of the Ecole Normale. To be a "normalien" in France stamps a man at once as belonging to an élite of training and intellect.

Entering this, Léon Blum ceased to be a schoolboy and became a student in the full sense of the word. He ceased to live at home and started collegiate life.

Incidentally—yet it was to be far more than merely incidental—this different life opened to him two new vistas. He became acutely aware of the other sex. It was a pleasant discovery. It revealed a new and a lighter side to life. And it led him to dancing. He speedily became an accomplished dancer. He had always had suppleness and a certain gracefulness of bearing and gesture. This had been by some criticised as verging on effeminacy and had earned for him the task of playing female parts in school theatricals. If it had not earned him open scoffing, this was merely due to the fact that any person who had once felt the sting of his ironical tongue did not feel inclined to renew the experience. But this elegance and grace were valuable assets in practising the gentle arts of dancing and consorting with young ladies. To these agreeable pursuits he gave himself up with frank enjoyment.

The other vista the Quartier Latin opened to him was of a more earnest and permanent nature. He was introduced to Socialist ideas by a fellow student, Louis Revelin, who gave him a new outlook on Jean Jacques Rousseau and on Robespierre and introduced him to the association of Collectivist Students. At the Ecole Normale, under the impulse of a very remarkable teacher, Lucien Herr, he began to study seriously the philosophy of Karl Marx. This made a much stronger appeal to his clear-cut logical intellect than the more confused and abstract philosophies

for instance of Bergson, that played an important part in collegiate teaching.

Lucien Herr was an introducer to academic Socialism than whom no better could be found. He was the librarian of the Ecole Normale. A man of transcendent intellect and sterling character, he was on more than one occasion pressed to accept other posts of greater weight and infinitely greater financial return. But he steadily refused. He remained at the Ecole Normale out of unselfish devotion to his Socialist ideas. He conceived it to be his mission in life to pick out of that élite of French students in the Ecole Normale, those most likely to be of service later on to the cause of Socialism, to win them over, to influence them, to train them in the Socialist way they should go. Lucien Herr was a judge of mind and character. It did not take him long to feel that this unruly, rebellious, elegant, flirting and dancing youth Léon Blum was of the stuff of which leaders of men are made. So he set himself to the task of making a Socialist of Léon Blum, but it was not till a later period that Blum and Herr became intimate.

Dancing and the study of Marxism are two fascinating occupations for a young man, but they are neither of them of conspicuous help in passing examinations. To do that demands more than a nimble brain and an eager intellect; it requires a good deal of dull plodding. Léon Blum failed twice running in the Ecole Normale examinations.

One day the director, M. Perrot, called him into his holy of holies and gently but firmly gave him the advice to leave the Ecole Normale.

With apparent lightheartedness, Léon Blum tendered his resignation. He had never really liked the Ecole Normale; living in displeased him, and he found the cuisine was intolerable.

No more fitting close to this chapter could be devised than the reproduction of a document penned at that time by Blum himself. It is what, at nineteen years of age, he conceived should be a funeral oration on himself. It is written on four half-sheets of notepaper in that thin, clear, fine handwriting that has not changed to this day. He sent it without covering note to a friend who at that time was holidaying in the Alps. It requires no commentary, for it reveals the man as he was then—as he still is: clever, humorous and critical.

The now somewhat yellow envelope lies before me as I write, addressed to his friend René Berthelot. The contents are:

(Extracts from the *Petit Sannionais*)[1]

To-day, Thursday, the young man, M. Blum, whose suicide we announced in our number of yesterday, was buried. After M. René Berthelot, in the name of the deceased's personal friends, had uttered a few moving words on his premature death, M. Georges Perrot, Member of the Institute and director of the Ecole Normale

[1] An imaginary local paper.

Superieure (did we mention that M. Blum had belonged to the Ecole Normale?) made a speech:

On August 11th, 1891, from Perros in the department of the Côtes du Nord, where I was holidaying with my daughter and my son-in-law, I wrote M. Blum a letter four pages long in which I seemed to forecast the sorrowful event we are here gathered to weep over. My extensive knowledge of human nature had allowed me not only to follow but to foresee the evolution of that impatient soul. At the time when I wrote to M. Blum I was, of course, unable to ask him to express to his family the share I was to take one day in its sorrow. It is a sad duty which I wish to fulfil in the first place. I will say to this weeping father, to the absent mother this: "Console yourselves. The memory of your son that is lost will not live in your hearts alone. He enjoyed the friendship of some, the esteem of many. Of course he had failed twice running in the *license* examination and would doubtless have failed again in November. But let us not forget that he had been admitted to the Ecole, and that is a difficult examination. Despite the law on compulsory military service, the number of our candidates remains undiminished.

I will say frankly that I did not like M. Blum. He had entered our school with a certain reputation. But we had swiftly recognised

that it was not justified. One must be very wary of these college reputations. I lost a very dear friend this year: Edouard Young. When he was with me at the Lycée Charlemagne he was supposed to be a much better pupil than I. Yet I have had a more brilliant career than his, and, in addition, I have always taken care to prepare myself for a long existence by careful hygienic measures. For to live long is, in a certain sense, equivalent to being of higher value. It follows that M. Blum was not worth much. He had on the general spirit of the school a pernicious influence, though his high and mighty character and his disdainful manner should have rallied the sympathies of but few to him. This is neither the time nor the place to talk to you about the Review in the foundation of which, last winter, he had a share. It was for suchlike futile amusements, for the pleasure of discussing with the supervisors, or merely that of affecting an ironical smile, that he neglected every serious pursuit.

The truth is that he had too high an opinion of himself. I do not remember who it was told me that, *before getting his degree* (think of that!), he was positively enchanted with his own essays. Mr. Marthe had not been a week in the school (where we had admitted him in pious respect for the memory of his father), when he asked me: "What is the name of that big lad who is so obviously pleased with himself?" There is

no greater proof of feebleness of mind than the fact of admiring oneself, said Pascal; particularly at the Ecole Normale, where a young man can really find others worthy of comparison.

This is what I never ceased telling him. People called him intelligent! Perhaps he might have understood if life had given him a few more warnings. But that is all over now. . . .

Editorial Note: The interesting passages from this funeral oration, which in reality has not yet been pronounced, are borrowed from a letter we have recently received from this eminent archæologist.

Kindest regards,

LÉON B.

CHAPTER III

THE CLEVER YOUNG-MAN-ABOUT-TOWN: 1892–96

ONE AFTERNOON IN the early 'nineties, M. Ribot, the then French Foreign Minister, was working in his room at the Quai d'Orsay. Suddenly the door opened and a couple of youths burst in, saw the minister, cast a glance round the room, murmured an apology and disappeared. Ribot asked his secretary:

"Who on earth are these impertinent youngsters?"

"Oh," was the reply. "That's only little Bob and his brother René. He is organising the ball that takes place here to-night and must have mistaken the room."

"And who may Little Bob be?" persisted the minister.

"Little Bob" was Léon Blum. A now almost forgotten woman novelist, Madame Gyp, was at that time all the rage. She had created a character that appeared again and again in her books; a youngster in an Eton suit, of infinite cheek but abundant cleverness who, accompanied by an *abbé* who had the thankless task of looking after his ward's morals and manners, meandered in and out of Paris Society, danced, smiled and

talked his way into every conceivable circle and was the very image of impertinent charm. The character suited Léon Blum so admirably in those days that, wherever he went, among the students of the Latin Quarter, among the young ladies of Society, even in the intellectual circles on the fringe of the Socialist movement, he became universally known as "Little Bob". Indeed he accepted the nickname without protest, and made a regular practice of inscribing himself simply as "Little Bob" on the dancing programmes of his partners.

Organising balls—as he was doing that day in the salons of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—was quite one of his specialities. Leading a "cotillon", revolving in a "quadrille", whirling around to a merry waltz tune, were favourite pastimes of an evening. Sitting out in some restful nook, caressing some fair hand or shoulder while the girl poured into his sympathetic ear her thoughts of pleasure or trouble—was even more to his liking. It was a peculiar form of flirtation that earned for him the epithet of "spiritual adviser to young ladies"—the word "spiritual" being doubtless used in a somewhat elastic sense. Whenever the elegant, witty, smiling youth appeared in a drawing-room, a little flutter went round the younger section of the female attendance, and he was soon surrounded by an eager throng of fair young things. His brothers, mightily amused, called this fair court of his, the "Cénacle",

after the title of one of the books of Marcel Proust, whom Blum, as we shall see, met at the *Revue Blanche*, and with whom he speedily became friends.

There was, in an amatory sense, nothing very serious in this activity of "Little Bob"; no *grande passion*, not even what one could describe as an affair. He found the whole thing vastly entertaining. It fascinated him. It was almost like an intoxication. But he was in love with the fair sex, not with any particular member of it. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he was in love with one part of the fair sex, the young and tender part. For women, as distinguished from young girls, he had little time to spare. It was altogether an odd variety of the love fever that is normal at his age; not quite easy to describe. Perhaps it may best be indicated by quoting three sentences Blum wrote himself on the subject:

"I have often been jealous without being in love."

"My flock sometimes errs and scatters up the slopes on the side of the road, but I call them severely back into the narrow path."

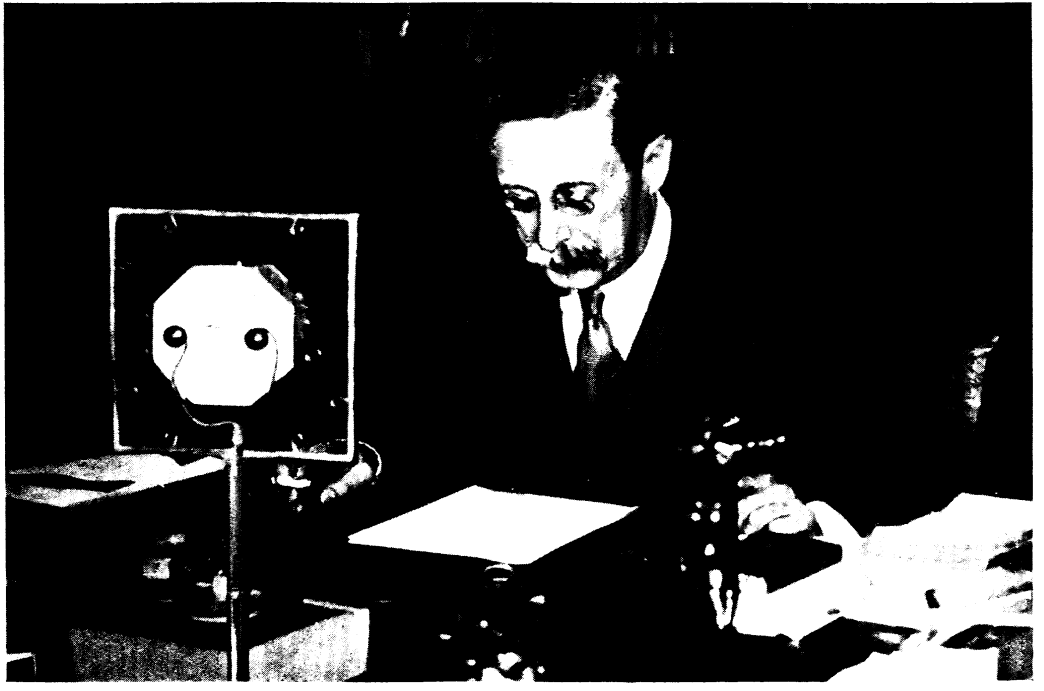
"I believed at that time that happiness consisted in arousing the curiosity of young women and the enthusiasm of young men."

For this second branch of activity the Latin Quarter offered opportunities in plenty. When he took the gentle hint of M. Perrot, director of the Ecole Normale, and left that distinguished

school of learning, he had resumed life in his parents' home. But he attended lectures at the Sorbonne and took an active part in student life. His friend Louis Revelin had founded the "A" —, which Sibylline letter denotes the "Association des Etudiants" and had become its first president. Léon Blum acted as a sort of secretary to him, with special charge of organising students' balls and social festivities. Under the influence of Revelin and still more of Lucien Herr with whom, after drifting apart on leaving the Ecole Normale, he had renewed close relations, he read up Socialism more and more. Its study fascinated him, but more as an intellectual exercise than as a piece of practical work; as what the Germans call "Weltanschauung"—outlook upon life, rather than as a concrete part of politics.

Politics interested him, of course, as they do every man of intelligence and culture. But in his attitude towards politics there was a certain detachment, perhaps just a trifle of intellectual arrogance. It was at this time that the Panama Scandal broke—a bomb that was to come near to shattering the Third Republic. He read about it, talked about it, but it did not seem to move him unduly. He was amused rather than indignant; amused particularly at the corrosive irony the Panama Affair aroused in the writings of his close friend Maurice Barrès.

In this phase of Léon Blum's life there is a very distinct trace of the influence of Disraeli's novels.



LEON BLUM TALKING TO THE PEOPLE OF FRANCE AT THE MICROPHONE

A certain brilliant superficiality, an unconscious sacrifice of thought to epigram, of contents to form, of earnestness to attractiveness. Yet it was far from being a barren period, empty of serious effort. On the contrary, it was at this time that Léon Blum crashed the gates of the editorial sanctum of the *Revue Blanche.*

This was a monthly review directed by Thadée Natanson; it played a very important, almost a revolutionary part in the intellectual life of France at the close of the nineteenth century. It was not Socialistic; indeed, if there were any dominant spiritual influence in it, it was rather that of Anarchy. The *Revue Blanche* was a conscious reaction against everything in art, in literature, in life, that has, in English, become known as Victorian. It was a vanguard publication. It introduced to the French reading public such authors as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Ibsen. It sang the praises of Stendhal, of Mallarmé, of Paul Verlaine. It espoused the cause of symbolism in art. Among its regular contributors were such men as André Gide, Pierre Louys, Marcel Proust, Maurice Barrès, Anatole France, Tristan Bernard.

In the midst of this brilliant galaxy of writers, whose work was to dominate French letters for over a generation, there appeared one day this beardless young man, Léon Blum. "Infernally cheeky but irresistibly charming," was the immediate reaction of the *Revue Blanche* editorial staff. They were soon to admit that there must be

added to these two superficial traits, a soundness of taste and a sureness of critical judgement that, added to a limpid and elegant style, were to win for Léon Blum a place of honour among them.

His first article in the *Revue Blanche* appeared on July 25th, 1892, and was entitled "The progress of a-politics in France"; it was dedicated to his friend Barrès, at that time reactionary deputy for Nancy. It was to be the first of many articles, of which the most important were critical essays on such writers as Renan, Paul Bourget, Rudyard Kipling and Anatole France. Incidentally it may be noted that Blum showed keen appreciation of Kipling's rich qualities, and has remained a staunch admirer of his works. These essays attracted much attention in the literary world, so much so that Anatole France, when discoursing on literature in a circle of friends, all of whom were much senior to Blum, would often say: "That is my feeling about it, but let us hear what Blum has to say!"

For years, indeed, until the disappearance of the *Revue Blanche* in 1903, Blum did its book reviews regularly, and acted as a kind of literary arbiter. He did so with courage and independence. It was natural that in a vanguard review written by rising writers, imbued with a spirit of revolt and modernism, there should have been a tendency to belittle the classical spirit, the classical style. But Blum, who had nourished himself on the classics, boldly set himself against this tendency.

His appreciation of the new did not weaken his allegiance to the old; for him the venturesome to-day was not in real opposition to the glorious yesterday, but was its development and evolution.

This attitude of mind is in itself a noteworthy sign of maturity, and indeed what struck such men as Anatole France most in Léon Blum as a critic was his maturity of judgement. When one reads over to-day these acute literary verdicts, and estimates of Léon Blum, one finds that his judgement stands, though over forty years have elapsed since it was phrased. And in not one single sentence does his extreme youth betray itself. It is the judgement of a man, never the expression of youthful impulse.

Léon Blum's pen did not content itself with literary criticism. He contributed many other pieces to the *Revue Blanche*. Sketches, short stories of no permanent value perhaps, but interesting for their psychological touches and because they form a connecting link between the "Little Bob" of society routs, the elegant young-man-about-town, and the rising but already serious man of letters. And then, most strange of all, there is that sporting and racing column which, together with Tristan Bernard, he conducted month by month in the *Revue Blanche*. These notes were always well informed and were assiduously quoted in the racing set. Yet they are not void of a certain philosophy; Blum had the gift of lifting even a racing chronicle to an intellectual level.

It was during this period that he started writing his *New Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann* which first appeared in the *Revue Blanche* between 1892 and 1896. We have noted how deeply imbued with Goethe he was; and, of course, to a student of Goethe, these revealing conversations with Eckermann are as a Biblical text. It was indeed a bold stroke of originality to project Goethe into the present time, to make him speak of men and events in the day's news a century after his death—speak of them as if he knew them and was in daily intimate contact with them. It was a dangerous experiment; in the hands of most writers, even experienced and skilful men, it would have been a ridiculous failure. In point of fact, it proved to be a triumphant success. So much so that, to-day, there are Goethe students who read Léon Blum's *New Conversations with Eckermann*, not only for the pleasure they get from the book on its intrinsic merits, but for the light it throws on the turn of mind and methods of thought of the great German poet. Léon Blum was well aware of the boldness of the undertaking; that is why the volume, when it appeared, bore no author's name on the title page. He felt that to add his signature would be an impertinence. To-day these reasons for anonymity no longer exist. The book stands on its own merits, not merely as a unique example of literary conjuring, but as one of the best, if not the very best, of Léon Blum's works.

When he was seventeen, an academic essay of his on happiness caused an examiner to say: "If it be true that this student is only seventeen, he is a monster!" At twenty-two he was a recognised literary critic. In addition he was a young social lion, an almost legendary figure in the gilded youth of Paris; he had a reputation for wit; he was known to be toying with Socialism; he was a much sought after dancing partner and a welcome guest in Paris literary salons; he was popular among the Sorbonne students and his name was well known in the sporting world; he danced and dined his way through Paris Society. Little wonder if he was looked upon as a social phenomenon. His versatility seemed unique. Everything he touched seemed to shine. Georges Clémenceau, the dreaded "Tiger", who was already ferociously knocking out ministries, called him "the modern Alcibiades".

The life of unceasing and manifold activity had not taken any definite direction. Success was dispersed on so many widely divergent fields that one might well fear it would find no permanent outlet. There have been, in history and in romance, instances of such brilliant youthful versatility; seldom did they yield fruits of real value. Fireworks may be a magnificent sight, but they are transient; they leave but smoke behind them; they have no practical utility. There was a danger lest the career of Léon Blum might be but a firework. It was saved from that by two events;

the resumption of serious, purposeful study, and his early marriage.

Study had never been abandoned, though the part it played in Blum's many sided activities had been obscured by more showy occupations. At the Sorbonne he studied law and literature; he passed his degree examinations for the *license ès lettres* and the *license en droit.* Then, with keen interest, he followed the lectures of the *Institut des Sciences politiques* in the rue Saint Guillaume. He showed his versatility even in his studies; tasted of this science and of that, flitted from one branch to another with a catholic thirst for knowledge. But it was law that attracted his attention most. He might have elected the bar, to which, after the lapse of many years, he was to turn. But he ended by deciding to sit for the very stiff examination for entrance to the *Conseil d'Etat.* This was partly due to his father's advice, but also to a sentimental attachment to Stendhal, the writer who had most influence on him. Stendhal had been a member of the *Conseil d'Etat* and Stendhal, he felt, was a most worthy example to follow.

There is in the public administration of Great Britain or of the United States, no institution parallel to the *Conseil d'Etat.* It was founded by Napoléon I and partakes both of a judicial and of an administrative character. It acts as the juridical adviser of the Government of the day and fulfills the task which, in England, falls to the law officers of the Crown. Bills in draft form

are submitted to the Council, which gives its advice on wording and legal bearing. This advice is frequently asked for when the Bill is being considered by parliamentary commissions, and is regularly quoted by the minister in charge. But the *Conseil d'Etat* has another primary function, which makes it one of the strongest bulwarks of individual and democratic liberties; it is the judicial arbiter in all cases of conflict between the citizen and the State.

Léon Blum failed at the first time of asking. He put himself in the hands of a coach who made a speciality of this examination, a certain M. Tardieu, uncle of that André Tardieu who was to become Prime Minister in after years, and on whom Léon Blum was to wage bitter war. In 1895 he passed the examination and was admitted to the *Conseil d'Etat*, where he was to remain for twenty-six years.

Apart from paternal advice and memories of Stendhal, the influence of Mademoiselle Lise Bloch had been responsible for this step which gave his life a purpose and steadiness that had been lacking up till then. He had known Lise Bloch for a long time. They had met very frequently in one of these hospitable salons where he was always welcome.

At the Bréals', whose daughter Clothilde, Lise Bloch's cousin, was to become the first wife of Romain Rolland and, after their divorce, that of the musician Alfred Cortot, he met many

notable people. In the salon of the Hérédias he found three young girls, daughters of the house, who were to marry into literature: one, herself no mean poetess, becoming the wife of the poet Henri de Regnier, another that of Henri Doumic, secretary to the French Academy, and the third that of that delightful writer, Pierre Louys. At Madame de Caillavet's he was pushed and encouraged by Anatole France and came into contact with leading painters, sculptors and politicians of the Left. Madame de Caillavet's salon was the Left counterpart to that of Madame de Loyne, where Jules Lemaitre lorded it over the intellectuals of the Right.

It was in those circles that he met Lise Bloch who was, for forty years, to be his devoted wife and the mother of his children. A woman of intelligence and quiet charm, she came from a family that gave high servants to the State. Two of her brothers were officers, destined to become generals, while another was to become President of the *Cour des Comptes*.

As a matter of fact Léon Blum and Lise Bloch had met long before, when they were but children. They had played together, romped together, laughed together, with no thought but the child's enjoyment of the present. They had been good friends. Gradually this feeling of comradeship grew into a sort of tender friendship that itself developed into love. Their parents met one Shrove Tuesday afternoon in the apartment on the

Boulevard Sébastopol to settle, in approved French fashion, the details of the union. But it was by no means the solemn ceremony usual in French upper middle-class homes. It was Shrove Tuesday and the Carnival, which had long been celebrated in French Flanders and on the Riviera, was for the first time making its triumphant, riotous appearance in Paris.

From the balcony of the Blums' apartment that afternoon, the first handfuls of many-coloured "confetti" were thrown on the crowd below, to the hilarious delight of all participants. It was the Parisian birth of that "confetti" that was to be the rage of the Carnival till, years later, some dour chief of police forbade its use as "injurious to public health", and with his injunction killed Carnival celebrations in Paris. It was a merry afternoon, with Léon Blum in rapturous enjoyment leading the uproarious fun.

At the beginning of February, 1896, Léon Blum and Lise Bloch became man and wife. The marriage was a quiet family affair, and, soon after, the newly-wed couple left for Italy, travelling the whole length of that enchanted land to spend their honeymoon in Sicily. It was the first time that Léon Blum had crossed the French frontiers. He had without hesitation chosen Italy. Was it not the land where Stendhal had wandered in happy admiration? The magic land where Goethe had sought and found beauty and inspiration unending.

CHAPTER IV

JAURES TAKES A HAND

IT HAS BEEN said that it was Jean Jaurès who made of Blum a Socialist. In that blunt form this is a misstatement. It was not till 1896 that Blum met Jaurès, not till 1897 that the fight for justice known as the Dreyfus Affair drew them together in intimate contact. But Léon Blum was a Socialist long before that. At least, he was intellectually a Socialist.

There can be little doubt as to the two circumstances that form the spiritual matrix from which Blum's Socialism was to evolve. We have already noted them in passing. The first was his Jewishness: the consciousness of belonging by birth, by home influences, by early atmosphere to a people that has a centuries-long history of oppression, a people that down to our own time is in many lands the prey to iniquitous persecution. The Jews, moreover, as we have said, are a people one of the leading spiritual characteristics of which is a sense of justice. As Léon Blum himself said: "It is significant that where the Christian uses the word 'Saint' the Jew employs the expression 'a just man'." In an article in the *Revue de Paris* (1924) entitled "The Socialist Ideal", Blum wrote:

"It is not true that our appeal is addressed to the human animal. We appeal, not to envy, the basest of human motives, but to the instinct of justice and mercy that is the noblest of human feelings. We seek in the down-trodden slave to evoke that new morality that awakens with liberty." And in a pamphlet dedicated to his son, he wrote: "Socialism is born of the revolt of all our feelings, that have been wounded by life . . . Socialism is a moral outlook almost a religion, as much as it is a doctrinal theory."

The second factor, as we have said, was the influence of his maternal grandmother, Mme Picart, who was aflame with revolutionary ardour. She had first drunk at the well of George Sand; she had, under the Empire, visualised the Republic as the hope of the oppressed. The Commune had inspired her with passionate hopes; its bloody repression with passionate anger. And she had never tired of instilling into the boy those generous ideas of hers that were in essence Socialistic though of a kind of Socialism that was rather a reasoned-out creed.

Louis Revelin, a seventeen-year-old student whom he met in 1889, was the first one of Blum's friends to try to cultivate that promising virgin Socialist soil. Revelin was full of Jean Jacques Rousseau. He had studied closely the ups-and-downs of the French Revolution, its betrayal, its passing over into Bonapartism. He revealed to Blum a new Robespierre, vastly different from

the blood-thirsty monster sketched by teachers of history at school. He told him about that precursor of Communism, Gracchus Baboeuf, who came near to wresting from the corrupt hands of the Directorate and the eager hands of Bonaparte, what remained of the French Revolution and recasting it on a basis of rigid social and economic equality. And he showed him how the thread of Socialist effort ran through history, over the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, the *Ateliers Nationaux*, the revealing teachings of Marx and Engels, the Paris Commune, down to Socialism as it was when Jaurès took up the rôle of inspiring force.

Revelin showed Blum that Socialism was not a mere state of mind, but a historical movement based on a scientific doctrine. But it was Lucien Herr who induced him to study that doctrine and to apply to the world around him that dialectical method. Blum says so himself: "It was Herr who crystallised all these tendencies lying confused within me and who achieved a re-orientation of my individualistic and anarchistic nature in the direction of Socialism. All the negative work within me had already been done. It was a question of finding a ready-made form. . . . Herr brought me the idea of organisation, collectivism. It was like an operation for cataract."

It was through Herr that Blum was to be drawn into the Dreyfus fight. It was through Herr that he was to meet Jaurès. And it was Herr who first introduced him to the polemics which at that

time raged in the French labour movement and made him take an active interest in the controversies Jules Guesde and Edouard Vaillant had with Allemane.

In 1896 Léon Blum had reached the point where, by historical study and logical process, he had become an intellectual Socialist. He was fully conversant with the evolution of French Socialism from Baboeuf to Saint Simon, Fourrier, Prudhon and the historical materialism of Marx and Engels —the Communist Manifesto of 1847. Charles Andler had induced him to study closely Marx' *Capital.* Herr had showed him the Hegelian roots of Marx' philosophy.

But so far Blum's Socialism was merely a mental process founded on a sentimental attitude. It had not taken possession of him. It had not affected his life.

Neither the persuasive eloquence of Revelin nor the patient teaching of Lucien Herr nor the fascinating logic of Karl Marx had been able to wrest Blum from the side of life he knew best because it was that in which he had been born and bred. He was moved by sympathy for the oppressed. He could demonstrate the causes of that oppression. But when it came to tackling the oppressors he suffered doubts. These capitalists, these pillars of the existing social system—he knew them well, he liked many of them, he dined with them, he danced in their ballrooms and enjoyed the talk of their salons. They were, in a way, his world.

He was an ardent lover of the theatre; and, as an absorbing side-line, a professional theatre critic. One of his most intimate friends was that attractive person and brilliant playwright Porto Riche. He loved that whole atmosphere of the Paris theatrical world. It was not an atmosphere of the masses. True, there were tragedies of the heart and the spirit, not of empty bellies and horny hands. Jealousy, love, ambition, lucre were the strings that pulled the puppets; not labour and hunger, privation and sickness. The keenest of these sorrows were cradled in comfort, not to say in wealth.

One grows to love that which one knows well. And young Blum knew that Society world extremely well. He could not find it in his heart to hurt it, to attack it, far less to hate or seek to destroy it. His sympathy with suffering was that of the man who has never suffered save at second hand. The eyes with which he glanced at the masses—moist though they might often be with tears—were the eyes of the aristocrat, an aristocrat of intellect, culture, atmosphere, but an aristocrat all the same. Even intellectual luxury—perhaps especially intellectual luxury—is a vice. Vices are insidious things like soft perfumes that permeate one's life. They are hard to shake off, for they constitute a kind of slavery in which the victim is usually unconscious that he is a slave.

Truth to tell, the Léon Blum of 1892, of 1896 was not quite unconscious of it; and in 1896

considerably less so than in 1892. His extreme sensitiveness on the one hand, his clear thinking on the other, were potent obstacles to such unconsciousness. He realised that there was within his life an awkward dualism, that dualism of which we have spoken, between his Socialist intellectual conviction and his bourgeois social atmosphere. Very slowly, falteringly, he tried to evolve in the direction dictated by his mind. But it may be doubted whether that evolution would ever have made really effective progress had it not been hastened by some explosive force outside his own complex personality.

We shall see shortly how Jaurès acted on Blum. Meanwhile it would not be amiss to sketch out broadly what Socialism meant to Jaurès. The Socialism of Jaurès, as indeed, broadly speaking, French Socialism as a whole, differed in some respects from German Socialism which at that time dominated the international labour movement.

His Socialism was in its theoretical fundamentals Marxist, but was tinged with the idealistic optimism of Jean Jacques Rousseau. Jaurès recognised historical materialism and the transcendental importance of the economic factor in the evolution of mankind but he saw other things besides; imponderable factors such as human nature, faith, passion. His materialism was modified by idealism.

The difference was not confined to fundamentals, but manifested itself in tactics. While German Socialism looked upon success as a matter of pure

organisation, of disciplined numbers, French Socialism, affected on the one hand by revolutionary traditions, and on the other by anarcho-syndicalist leanings, was inclined to look upon propaganda as preparation not to the organisation of a huge party, but to decisive mass action on the part of the working class, even if that mass action be a matter of a general strike for instance, or of an armed rising. There were no less than five groups in the French Socialist movement of that day. Some were avowed opportunists; some limited their dreams to the achievement of immediate possibilities. Others were "*jusqu' auboutistes*", i.e. men ready to go the whole hog at once. There were Reformists. There were Socialist Revolutionaries. But in the main it was true of French Socialism that it was more sentimental in essence, more explosive in tactics, more radical in spirit than German Socialism.

The continental labour movement continued for many years to be split by these differences. One may say roughly, that, up to 1934, the German view held the field, until it had been realised that this method led either to inglorious capitulations such as that of German Social-Democracy, to sterile lip-service such as that of the English Labour Party, or to glorious but hopeless stands like that of the Viennese workers. Only then did the more elastic French method win assent.

It is precisely this blend of materialism and idealism, of democratic method and revolutionary

élan, that has given the French proletarian parties —both of them, since at the time of writing there are still two—not only a leading position in their respective Internationals, but has enabled them to achieve an appreciable measure of success.

Léon Blum was to have his own qualms about this dualism. It was many years before he was to hit upon the practical solution. And when he did, in 1934, it was perhaps rather a response of his sensitiveness to mass instincts than a deliberately thought out process. But as far back as 1924, in that article in the *Revue de Paris* from which we have already cited a passage, he had dimly outlined the ideological bridge between the two positions.

"Karl Marx has taught us that the imperativeness of events is working for us, that the internal laws of evolution lead present-day society irrevocably towards the new-model society we conceive; that the system of collective property is prenatally formed within the capitalistic system as the child in the womb of its mother."

In a lecture he delivered in 1917 on Jean Jaurès Blum analysed the rôle of his murdered leader in the movement: "In all essential problems," he said, "his genius manifested itself in conciliating, infusing into one living entity, notions, systems, methods of action that seemed directly opposed to each other—that, in point of fact, had before him been contradictory."

This judgement is interesting because it shows at once what Blum admired in Jaurès and what he tried to emulate. The Popular Front experiment is the attempt to translate this Jaurès method into terms of practical politics. Blum develops this thought further in the course of this lecture. He shows how and why the idea of Socialism had become divorced from that of the Republic. He shows how, in the mind of Jaurès, the two ideas were in reality a synthesis.

It is untrue to claim that Blum invented the Popular Front idea—that idea which puts Democracy in the service of Socialism and Socialism in the service of Democracy. But it is undoubtedly true to say that if, in 1934, Léon Blum responded to the call for Unity in defence of Democracy even at the possible cost of delaying achievement of the integral Socialist programme, it was largely due to the fact that his mind had been years before profoundly influenced by Jaurès.

But we have been anticipating.

Léon Blum was introduced to Jaurès by Lucien Herr in the former's tiny apartment, 27 rue Madame, under the shadow of the church of Saint Sulpice.

He was at once seized by an overwhelming wave of enthusiasm. There was a lyrical strain in Jaurès that called aloud to Blum's love of poetry. Jaurès had gifts of irony to which his own responded eagerly. And he had a breadth and range of vision that impressed Blum tremendously. "On first

contact with him," wrote Blum many years later, "there was nothing in his bearing that compelled respect. He was a man of short stature, with a big head bristling with hair resting directly on his short body. His voice was hoarse at first, and only after a while did it assume its range of modulation from grandeur to softness. And yet, looking back upon a varied life during which I had occasion to meet many truly great men, I have met perhaps none—save maybe M. Albert Einstein—on whom the seal of Genius was so visibly imprinted."

Léon Blum was a good listener. He was captivated by the range of knowledge, by the manifest sense of justice, by the evident goodness of this man—a goodness of which he once said it was nigh unto saintliness. That lyrical quality of Jaurès was doubly welcome in that it never took the place of logic; it sprang from his logic as a blossom from the twig. Another trait in Jaurès attracted Blum with special force: his intimate knowledge of France, her people, her manners, her language and literature.

On his side Jaurès took great pleasure in his new acquaintance. Blum's elegance of phrasing was agreeable, but less so than his unusual blend of reason and sentiment. Early on in their friendship Jaurès realised that here were sterling gifts that could not be allowed to lie fallow. So, talking to him, he gave of his best.

It must have been a strange sight to see the two of them together, discoursing on philosophy,

politics and life. The elder man, a subtle thinker and brilliant orator, an experienced tactician but in manners clumsy, more than a trifle uncouth, of a rather unprepossessing physique. And the young man, faultlessly groomed, elegant almost to the brink of foppishness, but of lively wit and understanding mind. Both had the same deep-rooted love of mankind, the same nimbleness of thought, the same care for culture. To those to whom it was given to see them together, they suggested Socrates with Alcibiades. But a Socrates from whom there emanated some elemental force, like wind or fire, through the play of which one caught sight of a great heart and of rich treasures of imagination.

From 1897 onwards, Blum was, at the side of Jaurès, to follow day by day the developments of the Socialist movement in France. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say "in the shade of Jaurès". For that fairly expresses the relationship between the two men. As long as Jaurès lived, it never seemed even to occur to Blum to aspire to play an active part in the life of the party. He was content to observe and to learn.

What Léon Blum learned from this close association with Jaurès was perhaps less a political point of view than a tactical method and an attitude of mind.

Charles Andler, the biographer of Lucien Herr, writes that "to be a Socialist is to have adopted

a complete internal resignation and to have undergone a regeneration of the spirit".

It is that process that resulted in Blum from his association with Jaurès.

That is much more important in the long run than day-to-day political activity. We shall have occasion to follow that activity: the Dreyfus affair, membership of the Socialist party, refusal of tempting offers to enter the Chamber, silent but keenly observant attendance at party congresses. Save for the special case of the Dreyfus affair, that political activity was not pronounced or at least not obvious. The Jaurès period was for Léon Blum one of incubation.

It and the practical experience of government gained during the war, were to render Blum fit to play, from 1920 onwards, a leading rôle in the French Socialist party and eventually in the affairs of France and of the world.

The academic Socialist had become an active Socialist. The death of Jaurès was to open up a new period during which the active Socialism of Blum was to ripen and to bear practical fruits.

The day of that death, however, was one of the blackest in Léon Blum's life. The hand of the fanatic who struck Jaurès in that modest restaurant of the rue du Montmartre at the very moment when the clouds of war were spreading with tornado-like swiftness over the European sky not only deprived Blum of one of his dearest friends, the masses of their most trusted leader,

and France of one of her most magnetic personalities, but it altered, perhaps radically, the course of history. Dimly, the people of France felt that. Less dimly perhaps, Léon Blum felt it through his sorrow as he followed the remains of his teacher and friend. He was, though he knew it not, after the lapse of years, to take up the reins the murdered hands had dropped and attempt, at least, to carry to the stage of practical experiment some of the visions that had inspired Jaurès. It is a tragic thought that Jaurès, like Moses of old, died before entering the Promised Land, and that it was not given to him to know that it would be the young man whom he had loved and trained, who was to have that honour.

CHAPTER V

THE DREYFUS AFFAIR

FOR ONE WHO did not live through these years of turmoil, it is very difficult to realise what the Dreyfus Affair meant to France and indeed to the world. For two years, between the opening of the campaign for revision and the final pardon, normal life in France was suspended. Hearts and minds, logic and passion were diverted from ordinary activities and concentrated upon this one question. Not the man Dreyfus—for he was as nothing; but a principle, a bundle of principles. It was a question of justice, of equity, of honour and human dignity. Families were torn asunder in the fray; old friends parted; old enemies fell upon each other's breasts and wept when they found themselves in the same camp. It was perhaps the greatest moral battle in human history, for there was no question of interest at stake for those who fought for justice. Mere decency, mere abstract principle, were the things that actuated them. Interests, jobs, income, health, life itself counted for nothing. This epic struggle for justice is the most glorious page in the history of France; greater than all its wars and trials, its revolutions and victories, greater even than

the magnificent achievements of its art and culture. In the last instance it was a crisis that tested the souls of men.

Most of that army of heroes have died. The two men who started the ball rolling, Bernard Lazare and that dour Alsatian senator Scheurer-Kestner have both gone, and so have Colonel Picquart who endangered a brilliant military career; Emile Zola whose *J'accuse!* sounded as a clarion call through the halls of eternity; Anatole France who was to shed new lustre upon French letters; Clémenceau the "Tiger"; Jaurès, the mighty "tribune of the people"; Labori whose forensic eloquence shook the world, and countless others whose very names are to-day forgotten, but who took a valiant part in the fray.

Léon Blum is one of the few who are still alive and still in the front rank of the fight for social justice and human rights of which the campaign for Dreyfus was a part. He tells how he had been holidaying in the countryside near Paris and how one day his friend and teacher Lucien Herr came down to see him, jumped down from his dusty bicycle and brusquely said: "Do you know that Dreyfus is innocent?"

"Dreyfus?" For an instant Blum had to pause and think. Why, yes, of course! Captain Alfred Dreyfus who, three years before, had been found guilty of treason, had stood in the courtyard of the Ecole Militaire while the drums rolled dismally and while they tore off his tunic the marks

of his military rank and snapped his sword in two. He had stood there unflinchingly, with an odd grey quietness, with no spark of visible heroism, but a sort of apathy while his world crumbled about his ears and his honour was being trampled in the dust. And then, a mere numbered ghost, he had crossed the seas with assassins and burglars and the scum of mankind, to that sun-scorched rock off the coast of French Guiana, there in the normal course of things to be forgotten and to die.

And that man was innocent?

The first reaction was one of incredulity. The man had been tried in due form. Seven judges had been unanimous in finding him guilty. And had the Press not stated that, on the very day of his degradation, Dreyfus had confessed his guilt to a captain of the Republican Guard?

Then the allegation of Dreyfus' innocence struck a dim chord in Blum's memory. In a conversation some time back with Bernard Lazare, one of the foremost critics of the day, he had learnt that Lazare had ascertained from the former governor of Dreyfus' prison, Major Forzinetti, that the story of the alleged confession was a myth, that the wretched man had, on the contrary, dully but persistently maintained that he was innocent. Lazare had gone further into the matter. He had submitted to handwriting experts a facsimile of the *bordereau*, that famous document that had been the ace of trumps of the prosecution;

and they had denied that this could be the handwriting of Dreyfus. And Lazare had himself published one of these cheap, ephemeral pamphlets that are sold for a few centimes on the boulevards, stating his conviction that Dreyfus' guilt had not been proved. But the pamphlet had been a mere flash in the pan. Neither Blum nor anyone else had taken it seriously. Subconsciously, too, there had been a feeling among French Jews that the sooner the Dreyfus case was forgotten, the better. A Jew had betrayed. He had been fairly tried and sentenced. It was all unutterably painful. Let the curtain of oblivion drop.

And now Lucien Herr stated bluntly, categorically, that Dreyfus was innocent! Lucien Herr was, for Blum, a man whose judgement could not lightly be set aside. Herr had led him to Socialism. Herr was the man who had made Jaurès a conscious Socialist. He was a thinker, a painstaking searcher after truth, an indomitable soldier of truth after he had found it. And he was a friend, a close and honoured friend. What he asserted must be thoroughly investigated.

The enquiry had meantime, unknown to Blum, made rapid progress. An acquaintance of Colonel Esterhazy's had recognised his handwriting on the incriminating document. Colonel Picquart, the brilliant chief of the Intelligence Department of the French General Staff, had, it transpired, submitted to his superiors a report that established Dreyfus' innocence, and had been promptly

dismissed from his high post and removed to an obscure position in some North African desert.

It became swiftly clear that the evidence available was already conclusive. It had convinced Jaurès. It convinced Blum. To such men a conviction of that kind was an irresistible call to action. There was, among the little group who knew the truth, no doubt as to the course to be taken; the facts must be published. And they did not entertain the slightest apprehension as to the result. They were convinced that the truth would be welcomed, that the judicial error would be recognised and repaired as quickly as judicial procedure allows. They considered the whole thing at first as just a normal piece of day to day work. They had no idea of the storm that was to break. They were thunderstruck when, from the very first minute, resistance manifested itself, not only on the part of Dreyfus' judges and accusers, but on that of his former comrades and personal friends. Their amazement grew when they were told that the honour of the French army was at stake, since it would be sullied by the acknowledgement that a court martial had committed a judicial error, and that, innocent or guilty, Dreyfus must remain crushed in order that France might live.

Amazement soon yielded to indignation, stupor to an explosion of fighting spirit. When, a few years ago, Dreyfus died, Léon Blum published a series of excellent articles in *Marianne*, in which

he reviewed the Dreyfus case; there he confesses that the opening tactics of the advocates of revision were clumsy. They enabled the Jingo elements to claim that this was a Jewish plot to damage France and the prestige of her army. Instead of leaping boldly into the arena and shouting: "Dreyfus is innocent. Here are the proofs. They have in part been furnished by a French superior officer of unimpeachable reputation, Colonel Picquart!" the revisionists proceeded cautiously, almost gropingly. They got the *Figaro* to publish veiled innuendoes, to put tentative questions. They held back Picquart's name. They hesitated a long time before giving Esterhazy's name as that of the putative author of the *bordereau.* They tried to inoculate the public with small progressive doses of the truth instead of flinging the whole truth at the public's head.

These tactics gave the adversaries time to gather their forces and organise a counter-offensive. The chief of staff of this gigantic campaign was a man of great resource, energy and cleverness, one of the pillars of the General Staff, Colonel Henry. A man whose venomous determination led him to forge documents and commit perjury after perjury, but whose secret motives have remained a puzzle to this day.

Dreyfus being a Jew, some of his most prominent partisans being Jews, it was inevitable that the whole affair took a violent antisemitic turn. Up till then antisemitism had never been a live issue

in France. The feeling existed in a latent form among the broad masses of the population, as it does in America, in England and in almost every other country. But the clear, logical sense of the French people, and the fundamental teaching of racial equality dating back to the Revolution, had always acted as a restraint. There was no hatred of the Jews; merely a sort of unconscious dislike in some quarters, mixed with half-humorous contempt. There was in France very much less occasion for that inferiority complex that is the real root of German antisemitism.

Yet a movement of sorts did exist, that had been fanned into greater activity than usual by the defeat of French reaction in and after 1878. Its leader in the 'nineties was Edouard Drumont, whose paper, *La Libre Parole*, was animated by envy and every uncharitableness. Even so he did not advocate pogroms. No Frenchman is likely to reach the depth of barbarism of a Hitler. But Drumont held, and proclaimed, that the Jews who held commanding positions in the business and the banking world, who latterly had made headway in literature, politics and the liberal professions, represented a foreign element in the body politic of France; and he invited that body politic to react.

For Drumont the bare fact that Dreyfus was a Jew was ample proof that he had been sentenced justly. But for many who fought fiercely shoulder to shoulder with him, the question whether Dreyfus

was or was not a traitor was of secondary importance. What did matter was that he was a Jew. What mattered was that his foremost advocates were either Jews or men whose political opinions tended towards the Left.

The French reactionaries of that time were smarting under repeated defeats. After having lost the battle for the Monarchy, they had taken some years to discover that a Republic is not necessarily Left; or at least that even a Republican constitution affords possibilities of action and of success to the reactionary forces. The upshot of that discovery had been the tragi-comic episode of General Boulanger. That adventure had ingloriously collapsed. But the suicide of the vainglorious General on his mistress' tomb in Brussels had not killed off the forces that had rallied around his name. It had demoralised them, deprived them of a leader and of a war-cry. The Dreyfus affair supplied them with a new war-cry. And as standard-bearer it gave them—an unexpected stroke of luck—nothing less than the French army. This was truly a magnificent umbrella, that could afford shelter to the most motley collection of men: ultramontane Clericals, Jingoes clamouring for instant war against Germany, envious Antisemites, die-hard Royalists, impenitent Bonapartists, timorous Conservatives and fiery militarists. It was the most comprehensive political umbrella ever devised. Add to that the French army, or at least the majority of its

corps of officers, and it will be evident that the forces massed against revision were formidable indeed.

On the other side there stood at first a mere handful of men without organised cohesion. The very Jews who might have been expected to help, hung back, with a few exceptions. They were frankly afraid of the consequences for themselves. They wanted above all else to conserve their rights and positions. They realised that the French Jews had on the whole had a quiet time, and that this was largely due to the fact that they had kept themselves quiet. Happy is the people that hath no history; "Let us carefully avoid making history!" they said. The masses, particularly the workers, were at first more or less passive. To them Dreyfus was in the first place an officer, that is, a member of a class that was not theirs. He had been found guilty of treason by a court of his peers. No doubt they were impressed by the fact that, with some exceptions like Philippe Barrès (who hesitated a long time), Jules Lemaitre and François Coppée, the intellectuals were mostly on the side of Dreyfus. But that did not suffice to move them to action; in the first stage they remained apathetic.

The Radical party, representative of French Liberalism, had been terribly shaken by the Panama scandal. Fear of new scandals, new complications, made the bulk of that party that is so strongly rooted in the peasant masses and

the smaller middle class take the line of least resistance: why cast doubt on the pronouncement of a court of justice? There were a few exceptions among the leaders: Clémenceau, Delcassé and Doumergue for instance. But on the whole at first the party was on the side of the *status quo.*

The Socialists had been, precisely as the result of the Panama affair, wafted fifty strong into the Chamber, but they were split up among no less than five groups. Jaurès, with Marcel Sembat, Allemane and a few of the younger men, had from the start thrown himself heart and soul into the fray. Other leaders, like Jules Guesde and Vaillant, were likewise in principle for Dreyfus; but they feared lest the fight on his behalf might divert the working classes from the fight for Socialism. That, in their eyes, was the only thing that mattered; the rest could wait.

Léon Blum had no hesitation. He stood by Jaurès. He did not quite endorse Jaurès' view that the battle for justice would attract hundreds of thousands into the Socialist camp, who would then remain there for the social fights of the future. He did not quite see Dreyfus in the rôle of a recruiting sergeant for Socialism, and events were to prove that his scepticism was justified. But he did realise that a party fighting for social justice could not but gain in moral stature by supporting revision. And anyway, whether it was good tactics or not from the Socialist point of view, the Dreyfus campaign was a matter of

duty, of elemental justice. On that ground alone it must be waged and won.

Meantime the prospects were frankly dismal. Some of the leaders went bag and baggage over to the enemy. Millerand—at that time like Briand, like, later on, Laval, a Socialist—wrote in the party organ that for him the Dreyfus Affair was dead and buried. The Government remained adamant against revision. Some quite honest fighters were showing signs of tiring of an apparently hopeless struggle. The innocence of Colonel Esterhazy had been juridically "established". The validity of Colonel Picquart's testimony had been authoritatively impugned; as far as the army was concerned he had been left with scarcely a rag of reputation or honour. The sky was dark everywhere.

It was then that the newspaper, *L'Aurore*, published Emile Zola's article entitled "*J'accuse*". It so happens that one of the authors of these notes was present in Clémenceau's editorial sanctum when Zola brought him the proofs of his article which he had handed direct to the compositors. The third man present was the writer, Octave Mirbeau. The three of them were chatting over the news of the day. When he was not in a rage, Clémenceau could be very gay, though his jokes were scarcely less corrosive than his invectives. Mirbeau was, however, a blade worthy of his steel. Suddenly the room, which was getting dark, was invaded by an excited group of journalists

and compositors in the wake of Zola. The latter held a bundle of proofs in his hand which was shaking visibly. He went over to the mantelpiece and, leaning against it so that a shaded light fell on the paper, he started: "I call it '*J'accuse*'," he said, putting on his spectacles, and then read it out. His voice was charged with rough emotion that filled the phrases till they sounded like hammer blows. Those present listened with growing emotion, with something approaching stupor. When he had finished reading he stammered out: "That is what I wanted to say. . . . I have said it. . . . I have said it all . . . but you will have to stand by me . . . to help me . . . not leave me alone."

The listeners trooped out, Zola with them. Mirbeau, leaning his chin on his walking stick, kept his eyes down so that the tears should not be seen. Clémenceau, who during the whole time had rocked himself to and fro in his armchair, smiled contentedly. Then he remarked shortly: "That fellow is quite able to walk alone!"

Blum read the historic article from beginning to end standing in the street beside the newspaper stand where he had bought the paper. "As I read it," he wrote later, "I seemed to be drinking a powerful tonic. I felt confidence and courage flowing back to me. The fight was not over. The defeat was not a final one. It was still possible to fight on, still possible to win."

Within a few hours that article had radically altered the situation. It upset Paris. It went straight to the heart of France. It galvanised the world.

Everything that happened thereafter was merely of lesser importance. The judges who had acquitted Esterhazy sued Emile Zola for libel. Zola was condemned. But the "patriotic" bubble was pricked and burst. The people judged between the two opposing witnesses: Colonel Picquart and Major Esterhazy. It made up its mind irrevocably that the former was an honest man and the latter a traitor. There is something higher than the verdict of a court; it is the sense of justice of a people.

The battle, however, was not yet over. Cavaignac, the leader of the party of French Liberalism, was Minister of War. His speech affirming Dreyfus' guilt was acclaimed by the entire Chamber with the exception of one single deputy. He had brandished from the tribune of the House an unknown document which he claimed contained the irrefutable proof of treason. The blow was terrible. All the more since Blum had confidence in Cavaignac's honesty and soberness of judgement. The fact that even Dreyfus' adherents in the Chamber had been swept off their feet by Cavaignac's arguments was a grave symptom.

Blum despaired. As he wrote himself: "Had I at that time had experience of parliamentary life, my sorrow would have been less acute . . . I

would have remembered how mighty, how contagious certain collective psychic movements can be in an assembly. I would have known how much steadfastness is required not merely to resist them but to avoid participating in them. I would further have known from experience how swiftly such movements are apt to collapse. It has happened to me, at 7 p.m., when I was struggling against the stream, to feel myself being lapped by an angry mob that would have dearly loved to have lynched me on the spot. Yet at 9 p.m., when the sitting reopened, to see these same men surround me, saying: 'You were right.'"

At the time, Blum was struck with dismay. He was sitting with Lucien Herr and a friend who had come straight from the Chamber with the news. Tears were in their eyes. Jaurès suddenly burst in on them like a tornado. He stormed at them, ridiculed them: "Our cause lost? Why, do you not see that, for the first time, we hold victory within our grasp? The Prime Minister Méline was safe from our attacks because he kept his mouth shut. Cavaignac is beaten in advance because he has opened his mouth. Now he has spoken, they can no longer hold that fatal document from us. They will have to publish it. And, let me tell you—that document is a forgery. It smells of forgery! It stinks of forgery!"

That same acute sensitiveness that had caused Blum to despair, revealed to him in a flash how right Jaurès was. The evening had started with

tears of anguish; it ended with the gladness of certain victory.

The masterful articles of Jaurès in the *Petite République* analysed and exposed the fraud so irrefutably that Cavaignac who, though blind, was honest, had Colonel Henry who was responsible for it, arrested. Henry committed suicide in his cell. For all practical purposes the Dreyfus Affair was over. The Court of Appeal, the pardon, freedom, were formalities. Justice had triumphed.

To that triumph Léon Blum had materially contributed. In his little book on the case he does not write of his share in the work; he does not say how valuable his keen legal acumen was to the defence, how laboriously he worked at sifting the evidence and preparing the brief of Labori and the other counsel engaged in the various cases connected with the Dreyfus Affair. He was taking a much needed rest in the Swiss Alps when the news of Henry's suicide reached him. He realised at once the significance of the deed. "The Affair is buried!" he wrote. What he probably did not realise at the time was what that affair had meant in his life. It had been his first experience of the turmoil of public life. He had been able, in close touch with men like Jaurès, to learn something of the art of swaying public opinion. Above all things he had been afforded practical, convincing instances of the danger of yielding to moods of depression, of abandoning hope. Young, almost unknown, he had not, so far as the public was

aware, fought in the front line. But he had fought. He had won his spurs.

The epilogue to the Dreyfus Affair had some curious features. Re-installed in his rank, Dreyfus had done duty during the war. In 1935 he died with the rank of colonel. The whole thing was almost forgotten, and there were but very few mourners followed the hearse conveying his remains to the cemetery. The "Dreyfusards" who remembered could be counted on the fingers of two hands. Alfred Dreyfus had always been a passive subject; he had never seemed to appreciate either what was being done for him or why it was being done. He had stoically borne everything without appearing to understand it properly. Petty manœuvres by his chiefs to retard his advancement had been his keenest source of trouble and anxiety. And, as Léon Blum said, it is probable that, if Dreyfus had not been the victim of the Dreyfus Affair, he would not have been a "Dreyfusard". By a quaint coincidence the funeral took place on the Fourteenth of July, France's national fête day. The funeral procession had to cross the Champs Elysées, lined with troops for the traditional parade. It was necessary to negotiate with an officer before he would allow the hearse a passage. As it crossed the avenue, the troops presented arms, men took off their hats and women made the sign of the cross. And none of them knew that it was the remains of Alfred Dreyfus that were being borne to their last rest.

CHAPTER VI

THE RIPENING OF A MAN: 1896–1914

ON THEIR RETURN from Sicily, Léon Blum and his young wife settled down in a ground-floor apartment in what was then called the rue du Luxembourg but was after the war changed to rue Guynemer. The flat was a trifle small, but had a pleasant view on to the Luxembourg gardens.

Life during the first period in that new home was greatly affected by the constant care for Madame May, the blind aunt of Lise Blum, to whom she had for years been as a second mother. Madame May had contracted cataract in 1892 and the disease progressed to an incurable stage shortly before the discovery of a surgical operation which, performed in time, could with ease have saved the patient's sight. Madame May was a highly cultured woman who felt her affliction doubly in that it deprived her of so many indispensable pursuits and that it made her, a proud self-sufficient person, dependent upon others. Her niece Lise had gladly taken upon herself the task of helping her to bear her great trouble, and even before his marriage Léon Blum had devotedly assisted in this pious endeavour.

He visited the afflicted old lady daily. Not only did he read aloud to her, but he took full charge of her entertainment. Truth to tell he did so without effort; it was for him the most obvious and natural thing in the world to help relieve suffering. Many a time indeed had "little Bob" incurred the curious, even caustic remarks of his friends by going out of his way to be kind, courteous and helpful to beggars and distressed persons whom he met. This care for the blind aunt was no mere act of easy courtesy, however. He gave himself great trouble to help her effectively—led her here and there, describing to her everything he saw, explaining, suggesting, painting in words vivid pictures for her blind eyes to see.

Madame May came to live with the Blums and, till the day of her death, they never left home without taking her with them, to Enghien near Paris, to Ormesson in Switzerland to spend the summer. In 1897 Lise Blum's mother died, which cast a great shadow on the household but drew even closer the bonds that united it to Madame May. In 1898 she accompanied them to Rome.

It was with great reluctance that Blum left Rome. He had actually seriously contemplated giving up Paris and his whole career to settle down in a Rome where every stone to him was charged with meaning and beauty. But Paris and its manifold duties were calling imperiously.

His was indeed a busy life. The whole of the morning was taken up with close study of the

Conseil d'Etat records. In their grey covers they were piled as a tower each morning on his desk. One by one he would read them through, making an annotation here and there, working with astonishing rapidity. The pile on his left subsided. The pile on his right grew swiftly. Then, luncheon and back to work to the judicial hearings in the *Conseil d'Etat.* He was making his mark there. Not only because of his unusual facility for work, but because of his gift for penetrating straight to the heart of every question, discarding non-essentials as if by instinct, and phrasing his conclusions in language as elegant as it was clear.

The President of his section of the Council of State secured his appointment as Commissary for the Government, in which capacity he had to give a reasoned opinion on every single case that came before the court. He held this delicate post till he entered the Chamber of Deputies in 1920. A conscientious worker, a brilliant jurist, he was never deserted by his sense of wit and fun which made him popular among his colleagues. There always has been that human side to Blum even in his most hard-working moments. A friend would call while he was going through that alarming mass of *dossiers.* He would crave forgiveness for a while and finish what he was doing. Then he would rise, in his effusive way clasp his arm round his visitor's neck, playfully slap his cheek, hear his news, smile and laugh, tell a witty story or

draw a book and read aloud some verses that seemed apt or the beauty of which had struck him. A few minutes later he would be deeply immersed in work again.

For all his deep attachment to his work and the reverence he felt for the *Conseil d'Etat*, he was in some things an impenitent heretic. He created almost a revolution one day when he entered the gate of the Palais Royal, where the Council sits, jauntily carrying a bowler hat on his head. The venerable institution had never seen aught but silk hats. It got used to Blum's bowler. As indeed in later years Paris society had willy-nilly to get used to Blum's broad-rimmed black felt hat, an article that, until then, had been restricted in the wearing to the Bohemian quarters of Montparnasse or Montmartre.

But he had an acute, perhaps over-acute sense of duty. When he joined the Socialist party, he took an unprecedented step. He called on the Vice-Chairman of the *Conseil d'Etat*, at that time the somewhat solemn and conservative Monsieur Lafèvrière, and candidly informed him of the fact that he had joined the Socialists. A Socialist magistrate was in those days an unheard-of phenomenon; the very idea seemed an outrage. All the more reason why, Blum felt, he must tell the Vice-Chairman, who *ex-officio* presides over the *Conseil d'Etat*. And the high functionary, though undoubtedly deeply shocked, did not demur. Perhaps he felt that nothing else was to

be expected from a man who went to the *Conseil d'Etat* with a bowler hat!

Home life and his work on the Council of State did not by any means absorb all Blum's energies. There were legal articles in the *Revue Blanche* signed "Juriste" or not signed at all. There was a lot of miscellaneous literary work, to which we will return. There was the abundant reading necessitated by his being in charge of book reviews for the *Revue Blanche*, a position he held till 1900 when André Gide took it up and kept it till the Review died in 1902. There was his activity as a member of the Socialist party, attending congresses and the like. There was the business of keeping in close touch with public events during a somewhat crowded period: that of the Boer war, of Fashoda, of the Franco-Russian alliance, of the rise of the *Entente Cordiale* with Britain, of the stormy struggle in France itself between Church and State. And last but certainly not least, there was the theatre and dramatic criticism. Hardly a night passed during the Paris season that Léon Blum had not to go to some theatre and to write a criticism of some play. He did so regularly, professionally, for the *Matin*, for the *Petite Republique* and, after 1914, for *L'Humanité* which Jaurès founded in that year. The *Grande Revue* and *Concordia* were other publications to which he contributed theatrical notes. Some idea of the amount of dramatic criticism he wrote may be garnered from the fact that

selected reprints of it fill no less than five full-sized volumes entitled *Théâtre.*

In this last and most congenial task he was stoutly aided by his wife, who accompanied him almost nightly to the theatre and who even, on occasions when he was too full up with other work, would replace him as critic. For the *Matin* he continued to act as regular dramatic critic till 1920.

This love of the theatre, this assiduity in going to it and in writing about it, was perhaps in a way a safety valve. Scandal-mongers have scrutinised in vain Blum's private life for such spicy morsels as scandal-mongers love. A life so full of work and cultured recreation affords no room for the things that give rise to scandal, founded or unfounded.

In enumerating Blum's manifold occupations we have forgotten one: his intense social activity. Blum has ever been a man of numberless contacts and of many friends. With Maurice Barrès his relations had cooled off when Barrès ranged himself on the side of injustice in the Dreyfus Affair. He is one of the very few friends whom Blum ever dropped. The few other acquaintances whom, after a while, he did drop were men in whose character he discovered some blemish. Very large-minded, very forgiving, very understanding, he set a high standard of honour for his friends. But any friend who answered to that standard remained his friend to the last. Apart from Porto Riche,

Jaurès and Lucien Herr, he was especially fond of being in the company of Octave Mirbeau, Anatole France, Tristan Bernard, André Gide, Madame Romain Rolland, the other Berthelot family, the brothers Natanson and, of course, his own brothers to whom he has always remained united by a deep affection.

Without dropping old friends he was ever making new ones, for of Léon Blum it may truly be said that he is a man with a genius for friendship. All, whether old or new, were often and warmly received in the little rue du Luxembourg home. These were not society gatherings by any means; nothing more than informal chats, readings and discussions. Only the more intimate circle—the one enumerated above, roughly—was admitted as guest to luncheon or dinner. For the pleasures of the table Blum has, like almost all of his countrymen, always had a special care. He wanted the "cuisine" he offered his guests to be not merely beyond reproach, but beyond praise; and the slightest imperfection in a dish was the subject of pertinent and expert debate on the part of the master of the house. Lise Blum did her best to satisfy this very high criterium, but at bottom she never quite understood why the composition of a sauce should be a matter of tremendous moment. To please her guests she relied upon other qualities which she possessed in a high degree; her lively wit, her cleverness, her generous disposition.

It was sparkling, a table where that rarest of things in Society, intelligent conversation, was frequently relieved by merry laughter. Tristan Bernard had no effort to make to be funny; he had hardly opened his mouth than laughter fused. The sharp wit of Anatole France was at hand. As for Jean Jaurès, he could be profound and joyous in turn.

Just before the Blums left the rue du Luxembourg, an event happened that was the curtain-raiser to a revolution in human habits: the brothers Wright, whom Lazare Weiler had brought to France, made their first completely successful flight at Auvons. It was the birth of the airplane. Among the spectators was Blum. He was filled with enthusiasm—an enthusiasm undamped in those early days by foreknowledge of the disasters that were to mark the growth of commercial aviation, or of the terrible tragedies of wrecked towns and massacred women and children that were to result from the application of airplanes to warfare. Blum's enthusiasm was not only unapprehensive; it was carried on the wings of a great hope—that this new progress would tend to better the lot of the distressed and the oppressed.

This was in 1908. The steady growth of the Blums' social circle, made the apartment too small. A friend, one of the directors of the Larousse library, was having a house built on the boulevard Montparnasse; a house in that modern style that implies a certain stiffness of line, but provides

space, light and air. The Blums took a flat in that new building, but as it was not ready in time they spent a year in the house of their friends the Cortots on the boulevard Saint Michel. The two families not only harmonised perfectly in their temporarily common home, but for years spent the holidays together, in the countryside near Paris, or in Normandy, or in Switzerland or on the Basque coast.

The Montparnasse habitation was much roomier. It lay far back from the noisy street, for one had to cross two courtyards to reach it. The windows looked out on to the garden which Philippe Berthelot, who with his wife had taken the ground floor, had spent much care in arranging. The drawing-room was furnished by Lise Blum in old style, but with great taste. The dining-room was fairly small; the table would not seat more than ten at a time. Here reference may well be made to the legend assiduously spread in the Press as to Léon Blum's marvellous collection of silverware. The origin of the story is probably that, during the war, when Paris appeared to be in danger, the silver knives and forks, the family teapot and other trifles the Blum *ménage* possessed, were packed into a wooden case and entrusted to the care of an acquaintance living in Lyons who stored it in some corner of his works. Some clerk in the factory office told someone, who whispered it to someone else, who rushed with the story to a journalist, that the case belonged to Blum, the

chef de cabinet of a cabinet minister and must contain fabulous treasures. To this day the story of Blum's priceless silver keeps being revived by kind critics who in this way seek to cast discredit on a Socialist politician by representing him to be a millionaire.

One really valuable collection Léon Blum does possess—the result of a lifetime of careful and intelligent purchases; his library. And it is characteristic that by far the largest and the most stately room in the Montparnasse house was the library, which had by the builders been intended as an artist's studio. To it the bedrooms, which were tiny, had been deliberately sacrificed. A handsome gallery ran around it and the four walls were filled with books of every kind. Legal books in plenty, of course, as befitted a member of the Council of State. French, Latin and Greek classics. English literature from Shakespeare to Thomas Hardy, American from Edgar Poe to Faulkner; the complete works of practically every leading historian and philosopher of England and America. Saint Simon and Victor Hugo accounted for many shelves by themselves, and Goethe had a place of honour.

A huge oaken table, usually covered with legal papers and political leaflets, looked almost insignificant in this hall of books. Just a few knicks and knacks here and there to break the severity of the room, and two mural paintings, full of the grace and tenderness of Vaillard at his best,

completed the setting of Léon Blum's favourite place of rest and study.

The near proximity of the Berthelots was particularly agreeable to Blum. Every member of that gifted family had his or her points. Philippe Berthelot had that intimate knowledge of inner diplomatic history which belongs to a leading official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Allowing for the reticence attaching to that position, he yet spoke freely to Blum and the latter could thus store his marvellous memory with a wealth of facts regarding international affairs that were, in later years, to stand him in excellent stead. With René Berthelot he discussed philosophy, with André Berthelot the world of business in its wide international aspects. Madame Philippe Berthelot was a leading hostess. In her drawing-room, adorned by treasures from the Far East, the most varied and interesting kinds of people could be met: the stars of Paris society, diplomats of all countries, musicians, artists and philosophers, leading actors, prominent scientists and the cream of European aristocracy.

In this circle Blum moved constantly. But his own circle was still growing apace. The old friends of the rue de Luxembourg days were to the fore. New ones had been added: the charming and witty Guitrys; the poet and playwright, Edmond Rostand; the poetess, Madame de Noailles; Prince Antoine Bibesco and his gifted wife, Asquith's daughter; French men of letters such as Paul

Valery, Edmond See, Edouard Picard; Labour leaders like Albert Thomas; parliamentarians like Edouard Herriot, Monsieur de Jouvnel and Monsieur de Monzie; the leading "Left" hostess, Madame Manard Dorian. Then, of great importance for the formation of a future statesman, there were men who were already then, or who were to become, leaders of French finance and economics: Monsieur de Peyrimhoff, Tiardon of the great sugar firm of Say; Monsieur Robert Levy of the Galeries Lafayette; last but not least Monsieur de Finaly who, as director of the Banque de Paris et des Pays Bas, was to be for years one of the financial rulers of France. Scientists played no inconsiderable part in this brilliant gathering of the élite in Léon Blum's library or Lise Blum's salon. Professor Langevin, Monsieur Perrin who was, in Blum's Government, to become the first "Minister of Science" so to speak; Madame Curie —whose first word on hearing of the armistice in 1919 was: "Thank goodness! Now we will be able to see Einstein again!"; and Professor Einstein himself, when in Paris, was an occasional guest at the Blums'. Sometimes Painlevé would arrive, mostly on the days on which he had not been asked; sometimes breaking into the dining-room in the midst of dinner having absent-mindedly entered the house through the servants' entrance and the kitchen. For the man who was one of the world's leading mathematicians in addition to a prominent politician and future

Prime Minister, was the most charmingly absent-minded citizen of France. The list may be rounded off by adding many Labour leaders and Socialist politicians and a host of acquaintances, colleagues, men of letters or of the theatre who came to Blum when they wanted advice, or an introduction, or to borrow a book or to discuss some matter of interest. Somehow in a life so replete with many sided activities that any one of them would have sufficed to fill a normal man's day, Léon Blum found time to receive them all and to send none of them away without that which he had come to seek.

Such was the atmosphere in which the future Socialist leader lived, worked and played. It provided him with every opportunity to develop his knowledge of men, of politics, of life. It was not the normal atmosphere for a man who was to lead a proletarian party. Yet the sentiment of attachment to the people lay below the surface. This was seen in his handling of his little son Robert, a fair, curly-headed boy, slightly nervous and reserved, very sensitive, of whom he was exceedingly fond. When school age came, Léon Blum sent the boy to the communal school, there to associate with the sons of the common people. He remembered acutely his own schooldays with the children of the better-class bourgeois. For moral as well as pedagogical reasons he wanted his son to grow up in the rougher but, to his mind, healthier atmosphere of the people. It was not Blum the

æsthete, the highly-cultured critic who chose thus, but Blum the philosopher and the Socialist. And, after some debate, he persuaded his wife to endorse the choice. Robert Blum remained in the ordinary communal school until he reached the age to start the secondary education that was, in time, to make of him a capable engineer.

Blum's social intercourse was in the main an easy-flowing stream; he had the gift of making friends, the rarer gift of keeping them, but before he entered the political arena he made very few enemies. If a man did not appear to him to be worthy of friendship, he did not pursue his acquaintance. There was, however, one dramatic exception: a duel that arose out of theatrical criticism. Pierre Weber, who was Tristan Bernard's brother-in-law, had written a mediocre play, "Savine", which was staged at the Odeon theatre. Blum wrote a scathing criticism of it, which was deeply resented by the playwright. Tristan Bernard tried to make peace between his friend and his brother-in-law and induced Blum to accompany him to the *répétition générale* of a new play of Weber's at the Théâtre des Arts. On seeing Blum, Pierre Weber rushed up to him and slapped his face. Under the French code of manners, particularly in those days, a duel was inevitable. Blum sent Weber his seconds: Stéphane Lausanne, the well-known journalist on the staff of the *Matin*, and his elder but most intimate friend, the playwright Porto Riche. The writers Alfred Capus and Serge Vanel

were Weber's seconds. As the provoked party, Léon Blum had the choice of weapons and he chose swords. On the first shock Weber was slightly wounded and the doctors stopped the fight. The two erstwhile friends did not shake hands on the field; but it was not Blum who kept his hand behind his back. The two opponents were not to encounter each other for fifteen years, and then it was at the funeral of Madame Weber, Tristan Bernard's sister.

In the field of international affairs, many changes had taken place during this period in which Léon Blum was gradually ripening. The old feud between England and France that had flared up so dangerously in 1898, had been buried, thanks partly to the tactful common sense of Edward VII and the brilliant diplomacy of Delcassé, but partly, too, to the rapid rise of a militant Germany in shining armour. Japan had struck a first blow at the tottering fabric of Tsardom, and Imperial Russia, after having smothered in blood an attempt at revolution, had had to make concessions to the democratic spirit. Intermittent rumblings were being heard from the Balkans. Every now and then Germany shook a mailed fist in the face of the western world. Uneasiness began to spread. France, after a period of storm and stress, had finally disposed of her conflict with the Church and settled down to attempts that were rudely interrupted by the war. But, under Caillaux's direction, she first tried to

stave off the coming onslaught and ceded to Germany part of the French Congo. Many Frenchmen were indignant at this transaction. Blum approved; his sensitiveness had not failed to react to the overcharge of electricity that lay in the air; he, with Jaurès, believed a slice of the Congo was a cheap price to pay for peace.

But events marched on inexorably to the great catastrophe. In 1912 Poincaré was elected President of the Republic. Clémenceau, who had with might and main striven to prevent this, told his friends in the lobbies of Versailles that Poincaré's election meant war.

During this whole period, Léon Blum remained —apart from his activity in the Dreyfus Affair and his close observation of developments within the Socialist movement—in the background, reading, and writing, listening and storing up in the rich treasure-house of his memory the knowledge of men and events that was to fit him for a leading part at a later stage, after that war which his sensitiveness made him expect, while his logic and sense of humanity made him reject the idea of it with dread and horror.

CHAPTER VII

FRENCH PRE-WAR SOCIALISM

SOME ATTEMPTS WERE made to draw young Léon Blum into the vortex of parliamentary life. In 1902 Jean Jaurès had suggested his standing as a Socialist candidate for the Chamber. In 1906, before the general election, he urged him still more strongly. Almost unbounded though Blum's respect for the opinion of Jaurès was, he declined both offers. He might even then have had glimmerings of political ambition, but, whether from instinct or from better judgement, he deemed it better to wait; he was not yet ripe for the fray.

He contented himself with joining the French Socialist party, of which the leaders were, besides Jaurès, Bracke, Renaudel, Longuet, and Albert Thomas. He attended the meetings of his "section", as the local groups were called, with fair assiduity but generally contented himself with listening to the debates, observing intently, permeating himself with an atmosphere very different from that in which he habitually moved. The rare interventions he did make in debate singled him out to the attentions of his fellows, and in March, 1905, he was sent as a delegate to the party congress at Rouen. The Socialist movement in France

was, as we have already noted, split into several groups that spent much valuable time in conducting fruitless polemics with each other. To the more far-seeing members of all these groups it appeared that the first requisite for success was a fusion into one coherent and organised party. Indeed the necessity for such a measure had impressed itself upon Socialist leaders everywhere, and the Amsterdam international congress in 1904 had passed a resolution urging the necessity for uniting the various warring Socialist groups into one single party in each country.

He made a brief but unrecorded speech at this assembly in Rouen, as he did in the following year at the Paris Congress for Socialist Unity.

Léon Blum's oratory is of a peculiar kind. His voice is not of deep resonance; his gestures are curious rather than impressive, and he has none either of the torrential eloquence of a Jaurès or of the colourful imagery of a Bryan or a Lloyd George. But his voice if not deep, is clear and penetrating; and the lack of colour in his speech is offset by both rhythm and architectural line. Even his impromptu efforts are finished articles; architectonically built up, with logical precision, with convincing clearness, yet with an elegance of phrasing that is very musical to the ear. One has the feeling that, somewhere at the back of that cultured brain, there is an octopus-like memory that stretches out its feelers over the whole world, seizing facts and figures, bringing

them in and placing them with unerring sureness in their proper niche in Blum's logical edifice. Yet this oratory is never dry, never dull; it grips the listener. Through it all, like the much abused crimson thread, there runs that delicate sensitiveness of the man, who responds, perhaps unconsciously, to the slightest vibrations of his audience. They do not divert him from his self-appointed path, but they instantly suggest to him new forms of argument, sometimes appeals to emotion, notes of pathos that make what might have been merely a beautiful piece of oratorical architecture, a living thing, throbbing with life and fire.

It is not the eloquence of the market-place, of the megaphone, of the huge public meeting. It acts upon the masses perhaps less instantly, but more durably than even the most passionate kind of tub-thumping. And it has the supreme advantage of being of equal efficiency when it is addressing an audience of intellectuals, or a sceptical Chamber or even a bench of learned judges.

France is the home of orators. An orator lurks under the skin of almost every Frenchman. And every Frenchman is a severely critical judge of oratory. Yet, Léon Blum has attained the reputation of being one of France's best orators, and there is to-day no one whose name is a more potent draw at a public meeting than his.

During the whole of this pre-war period, with the exception of his participation in the Dreyfus

campaign, Léon Blum's political activity was rather that of the observer, of the student, of the disciple of Jaurès. Partly, too, of the reporter and the philosophical commentator.

Evidence of this latter activity is strewn throughout the pages of his *New Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann;* he let himself go more freely in these pages because they did not bear an author's name. The best way to give the reader an insight into Blum's conception of Socialism at this time, is to reproduce some passages of his work.

"I see full well that the Socialist doctrine renews itself a little every day and I know that, in this constant renewal, it remains always unfixed. But these theoretical differences do not disturb me in the slightest. . . . The beginnings of the Socialist party, like the beginnings of everything else, will be a clumsy leap into uncertainty. But do not let us worry unduly over the first start of the muscles, the first strokes of the piston in the machine. Soon the machine will live its own movement, with strong and co-ordinated pulsations. The principles are perhaps vague, but action and life persist through the force of internal development rather than by virtue of the principles. . . ."

"When we think of revolution, of a revolutionary act, we have naturally inclined to give these words a purely historical content, to fill them with images, remembrances, violences of the past. We see again Paris in flames, barricades, insurgents in rags chewing bullets, the whole of the heroic

and blood-stained imagery of the revolutionary days of June and May. We forget that the meaning of a word evolves with practical necessities. There are no rifles any more in the Faubourg Saint Antoine. The National Guard exists no more. But the military have repeating rifles and quick-firing guns, and Prefect Haussmann has given Paris broad, spacious streets while Prefect Poubelle has paved them with friable wood that goes ill to the making of barricades. I know not what form to-morrow's revolution may take, but it surely will be a different form from that of yesterday."

One passage, which relates to Jaurès, might well have been written of himself. He makes his resurrected Goethe refer to Jaurès' book *L'Action Socialiste* and say: "In these pages, spread over fifteen years of activity, every honest reader will feel the run of the logical uninterrupted effort of free thinking that gradually takes possession of itself. It is the history of a man of good faith who, as Hugo said, has grown."

He makes Eckermann speak in admiration of England because of the fact that some English cabinet minister was born the son of a smith, which, he feels, shows that, in England social barriers yield to individual merit. He makes Goethe reply: "But what will his children be? Gentlemen like the rest, wealthy, well groomed, proud. Aristocracy will have pumped up some fresh blood, that is all. That is not real equality. Real equality consists in a just relation of each individual to

his task. That, if he be so gifted, the smith's son becomes a cabinet minister, is an excellent thing. But what one would like to see, what one should envisage as an equitable consequence, is that if the cabinet minister's son were fit only to be a smith, he should become a smith."

He speaks of the Jewish upper bourgeoisie. "The life of the race is not seated there. Go seek for it in the proletariat among skilled workers, among the industrious and big-hearted youth of the lower middle classes. It is from there that the sap rises."

He makes Goethe argue against Hegel, who advocated making a clean slate of the past and seeking by dialectical means to find that which ought to be.

"I said to Hegel: I will take up the defence of tradition against you. But let us be clear about it; I will not give that word the same meaning as do Barrès, Maurras or Bourget. . . . For me, tradition does not imply standing still; it expresses the continuity of nature and history. *Natura non facit saltus*, such is the correct formula of tradition. There is, in my view, in the present state of things nothing sacrosanct or eternal. . . . Every institution; every nation, past or present, that impedes the progress of civilisation, of justice, must disappear; I admit that readily. But I hold that this process is regular, is bound by stable laws. To determine the future state of mankind, the philosopher or the politician may legitimately call as well

upon the experience of history as upon the pure yield of reason."—"Must one conclude from this reply to Professor Hegel that you blame revolutions?"—"How should I blame them?" said Goethe, "they are a natural phenomenon. After a certain time the dead oak tree falls to the ground and that, too, is a natural phenomenon. Doubtless, the laws of history are regular and stable; moral nature does not overleap intermediaries any more than does physical nature. But peaceful and continuous evolution is not the only law of natural development. In the formation of the physical world as in the constitution of human societies, results of an exceptional importance have never been obtained by a quiet and regular evolution, step by step. Something else is required: some sudden outburst of latent energy, the upheaval, the terrific crash of revolution. It is true that revolution has never upturned a soil that had not been previously mined; revolution breaks out only on the appointed day, when it can no longer hold the secret expansion of its strength. Evolution may thus prepare the way for revolution, but cannot replace it."

Though these pages were written by Léon Blum in his younger days, they remain the expression of his maturer thought, which, while it has naturally evolved, has remained adherent to the same roots. He who has looked with intelligence upon the methods of the Popular Front cabinet of the later Blum cannot but be struck by the forecasts

these passages contain. And the last of them may be usefully kept in mind by the reader who may feel inclined to speculate on the probable march of events should the forces that desperately oppose the Blum experiment succeed in violently interrupting or ending it.

Another side of Blum's Socialist interest in those days has been mentioned: his work as a reporter of events, particularly of the various party congresses that marked the forward march of the movement. This started with the Congress of Japy in 1899, of which Blum has recorded a most vivid and accurate picture. The years between 1899 and 1914 were dominated by the, at last successful, effort to unify the Socialist movement in France and by a very steady growth of the organisation. In 1905 only 35,000 persons were inscribed as members; in 1914 this had increased to 80,000. These, to English or American ears, seem very small figures indeed, but Frenchmen are not fond of organising themselves, their individualism makes them loath to rope themselves into any kind of association. The progress of French Socialism may be more accurately gauged by electoral figures: the Socialist vote grew from 380,000 at the 1906 general election to 1,400,000 at that of 1914; the number of seats increased from 38 in 1902 to 52 in 1906, 76 in 1910 and 103 in 1914. By the end of the period in question, the Socialist party played an important part in the Chamber; the speeches of leaders such as Jaurès,

Guesde, Vaillant, Sembat, Pressenssé and Albert Thomas found an echo in the whole country; a number of towns of various sizes had municipal councils with either a Socialist majority or a very strong and combative Socialist opposition. The Trade Union movement was growing at a faster pace than the party and though in France the trade unions remained till 1936 rigorously separated from the political organisations, they supplied a mass reserve fund from which the party drew its recruits.

More and more, after the Radical-Socialists had disposed of the clerical problem, that long-lived plague spot of French politics public questions in France tended to revolve round the conflict between employers and employed. Not only Centrists like Barthou, and Radicals like Clémenceau, but men who the day before had been active members of the Socialist party, Millerand, Viviani, Briand, threw the weight of the State into the balance against the workers struggling for a living wage and decent conditions of life. One after another the various divisions in the great army of labour, miners, papermakers, dockers, vine-growers, railwaymen, moved into action. First Clémenceau, then Briand, mobilised the troops against the strikers. Salvos were fired; blood was shed. These tragic events affected Léon Blum profoundly; against those responsible he conceived a resentment that time was to deepen rather than allay.

He took a lively interest also in the social issues that, more and more, dominated legislation: the pensions Bill, the question of public services, the purchase of private railways, the land problem. But what fascinated him above all things was the fight against militarism and against war, with the further question, at that time merely theoretical but soon to become of burning urgency, of the attitude to be adopted by conscious Labour in case of war. International events were from year to year pushing this question into the foreground: the repeated Morocco incidents, the grouping of European powers into two hostile groups, the Italo-Turkish war and finally the two Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913.

On this question the Labour movement was profoundly split. In France the cleavage was particularly marked. On the one hand were those Socialists who had remained conscious patriots, such as Jaurès. This did not prevent their fighting tooth and nail against militarism and looking with constant suspicion upon the imperialistic tendencies of all governments including that of their own country. Then there was the avowedly anti-patriotic clan of which Gustave Hervé was the most vocal exponent; that same Gustave Hervé who in later years was to worship rapturously at the patriotic altar and to-day, as the inspirer of the newspaper, *La Victoire*, advocates a sort of Jingo authoritarian régime indistinguishable from Fascism. Even Millerand had at one

time tendencies in this direction, and, at the Limoges Congress in 1906, Vaillant out-Hervéd Hervé. Their advice was to answer mobilisation with armed rebellion. Guesde headed a third group that contended that, while armed rebellion was not only justifiable but praiseworthy, it should precede and not follow mobilisation and a state of war. He coined the phrase: "I am for insurrection every day, save on mobilisation day."

These controversies were followed with keen attention by Léon Blum who, in this as indeed in practically all questions, had a viewpoint close to that of Jean Jaurès. The clash of ideas was by no means restricted to France: the battle raged at the international congresses of Stuttgart, Copenhagen and Bâle. It was particularly keen between the leaders of French and German Socialism and led to dramatic wordy encounters between Jaurès and "Führer" Bebel—as he was called—who struggled hard to avoid giving straight answers to the straight questions the Frenchman hurled at him with sledge-hammer force and precision. The Congress of Bâle in 1912 made a particularly strong impression on Blum. Not only because, under the pressure of the darkening European skies, the war question was felt to become more and more acute, but because the congress took place in an unaccustomed and impressive setting. The protestant cathedral of Bâle had been placed at the disposal of the congress; serried there under

a canopy of red flags the representatives of international Socialism sang a mighty Internationale the echoes of which were wafted over the Rhine and spread uneasiness in high places.

In 1910, Jaurès tabled his proposals for a new model army. They attracted great attention. Not only did they represent an attempt to conciliate national defence with hostility to war and to aggressive militarism, but by far-seeing men they were felt to be prophetic. Indeed developments from 1914 to 1918 were to prove that they were.

Jaurès and Guesde, in many questions of Socialist policy and tactics at one, were separated by this question of war, but their most violent clashes on this point were but the expression of honest personal differences of opinion and did not affect their general relations. There were other conflicts that revealed a vastly different spirit and filled with misgivings and genuine pain the observer, Léon Blum. The cabinet's proposal to enact a three years' period of compulsory military service led to such a clash, particularly painful to Blum because the main actors on both sides were his closest political as well as personal friends: Jaurès himself, Lucien Herr, Andler and Albert Thomas.

Stripped of ideological trappings the conflict resolved itself into a divergence of opinion regarding the probable attitude of German Social Democracy in the event of war. Andler, who knew Germany and the Germans intimately and who had made a special study of Social Democracy,

held that in the hour of crisis the veneer of internationalism would promptly peel off the German body socialistic. To rely on the class solidarity of the German workers, he believed, would be to lean on a broken reed. With no less passionate assurance but considerably less knowledge of the workings of the Social Democrat mind, Jaurès contended that the internationalism of the German workers was a solid rock upon which the future could safely be built. Blum's temperamental optimism ranged him decisively on the side of Jaurès in this critical controversy. As all the world knows to-day, events in 1914 were to prove that Andler was right and that Jaurès and Blum were wrong.

These and kindred problems of Socialist policy were still unsettled in 1914. It was decided to submit them to the mature deliberation and decision of an international congress. By a curious irony of history, this congress was scheduled to take place in Vienna in August, 1914!

The account of that side of Léon Blum's mental activity between 1896 and 1914 that touched Socialist developments would not be complete without reference to *L'Humanité*. This, the first daily newspaper of French labour, was founded by Jean Jaurès in 1904. The name itself was not only a programme but a symbol of Jaurès' notion of Socialism. As Jaurès wrote himself, that noble word "humanité" implied that the task of the paper was to be "the realisation of humanity, the union of all proletarians against the spirit of

sectarianism and dogmatic intolerance that was sapping the roots of Socialism". No better definition of the essence of Blum's Socialist faith could be devised than that.

Léon Blum never took a leading part in editing *L'Humanité*; to have done so would have been to have become what French political terminology calls a "militant", an active fighter in the Socialist cause. So long as Jaurès lived he was content to remain in the shadow of the great tribune of the people, listening, observing, learning; consciously or unconsciously preparing himself for playing a rôle in Socialist history at a later stage. But he contributed many critical essays to the paper and thus indirectly helped to establish its reputation. When, in after-war days, the French labour movement was split, *L'Humanité* passed into the hands of the Communists who were, temporarily, the majority; and Léon Blum, as we shall see, gave new life to *Le Populaire*, which in 1921 became the Socialist organ, and directed it until he exchanged the editorial chair for the presidency of the cabinet. *L'Humanité*, which has grown to be one of the most widely read papers in France, is still the organ of but one section of the French labour movement, but it still bears proudly on its title-page the name of Jaurès.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WRITER AND CRITIC

LEON BLUM'S PUBLISHED works afford a very fair idea of his versatility. With two of them, the *Réforme Gouvernementale* and the *Nouvelles Conversations de Goethe avec Eckermann*, we deal elsewhere. The rest include volumes of theatre criticism, a selection of speeches, an illuminating little book on the Dreyfus Affair, a volume of literary essays called *En Lisant*, an admirable study of Stendhal, *Stendhal et le Beylisme*, the much discussed *Du Mariage* and an exposition of pacifist faith, *Les Problèmes de la Paix*. This leaves out of the reckoning his innumerable articles and sketches in the *Revue Blanche* and his leaders in *Le Populaire* as well as contributions, mostly of theatrical and literary criticism, to other newspapers and publications.

A great deal of nonsense has been written about the book on marriage. In France it has been wielded by the Right Press as a weapon with which to discredit Léon Blum with the middle-class Frenchman and his wife than whom, despite contrary superstitions in England and America, there are no people more firmly attached to family traditions and conventional morality. Anglo-

Saxon reviewers, on the appearance of the book in England, with a few notable exceptions showed no understanding of the book nor of the mentality of its author. Some of them conveyed the impression that this was an amazingly immoral book that struck at the very roots of the institution of marriage. A very simple fact might, had they noticed it in passing, have made them pause: the fact, namely, that Léon Blum dedicated this book to his wife.

Since the work is now available in English there is little need to devote much space here to explaining what it is about. But its main thesis may be usefully stated. It is a revolt against the unequal treatment, or perhaps it were more accurate to say, the unequal position of the sexes. In theory marriage is the union of a pure and unexperienced young man with a virgin and unexperienced young woman. In practice, however, the young man is very seldom without experience; in many cases he has tasted often and deep of joys which, in the theory of the moralist, are reserved for married couples. Public opinion has become accustomed to these pre-hymeneal excursions of young men; it may from the viewpoint of strict morality consider them as regrettable, but it accepts them as everyday, normal facts. The result is that most marriages start by being lopsided. Léon Blum tilts at this condition of things because he believes that it is responsible for so many matrimonial unions proving a failure. He objects both on principle

and because of its nefarious consequences to the privileged situation of the young man as compared with the young woman. Marriage is organised monogamy, but man and woman are by instinct polygamous animals. If they are to be contented in their monogamous state, then they must have at least been afforded an opportunity for satisfying their polygamous instincts beforehand. Public opinion admits this as regards men but rejects it as regards women. Since morality is no respecter of persons, neither should it be respecter of sexes. What is sauce for the gander must be sauce for the goose.

No one can deny the logic of the argument. One can only contest its ethics if one is prepared to throw overboard public conventions in regard to the pre-hymeneal conduct of males, or alternately if the theory is propounded in a spirit of hostility to the institution of marriage. In point of fact the exact contrary is the case. Léon Blum's object was not to weaken, but to strengthen the institution of marriage. The method he advocates may be practicable or may be illusory; but no man who has read the book intelligently can claim that it is an immoral book. It is the very reverse.

The volume of literary essays published in 1906 under the title *En Lisant* has a fairly wide range. It reviews works of Abel Hermant, Maeterlinck, the brothers Margueritte, Pierre Loti, Huysmans, Léon Blum's own friends Tristan Bernard, Anatole France, Madame de Noailles, André Gide and

the scientist Marcelin Berthelot. It is characteristic of Léon Blum's devotion to Jaurès that he devotes an essay to the *Histoire Socialiste*. The book includes essays of a more general character, on German influence, on the social novel, on novels by women and on literary exoticism.

It is interesting to note how often Léon Blum uses parallels drawn from English literature. In writing about Tristan Bernard as a humorist he compares him with Dickens: "His humour recalls that of Dickens, but is more self-contained, more internal. What, in Dickens, arouses the impulse to be amused is the sudden paradoxical appearance of an observed fact, further the sharp distance felt between presumed truth and experienced truth. Dickens foresees this humorous effect, prepares it, insists upon it. Whereas Tristan Bernard remains slow and silent."

Dealing with novels written by women, he expresses the feeling that they are always marked by some excess, some extravagance; either a too painful accuracy or a romantic improbability, too much negligence or else too great a degree of application. "I can only think of perhaps one exception to this—George Eliot, whom I consider to be one of the most admirable novelists of either sex and of all literatures." Women novelists, he notes, seldom if ever make their books revolve round the central figure of a man. Again the only exception he recalls is George Eliot "and even so, *Adam Bede* is not her best". In one of his three

essays on the poetess Madame de Noailles he singles out her *Nouvelle Espérance* as "with Elizabeth Browning's *Aurora Leigh* the most beautiful poetic romance I know in any language".

In an essay on the contemporary novel he indulges in the exercise of seeking the novel to which the prize might be awarded. He ends by advancing the claims of Anatole France's *Le Lys Rouge* as an individual book. He adds: "If I had to designate the writer whose total work seems to me to be the most powerful and original I would hesitate between J. H. Rosny and Paul Adam. Are there any foreign novelists I would prefer to them? Here I have no hesitation: Tolstoy aside, I see two novelists whom I feel inclined to rank higher than ours. One is an Italian, Gabriele d'Annunzio; the other is an Englishman, Thomas Hardy."

There is a great deal of literary criticism disseminated throughout the pages of the *Nouvelles Conversations de Goethe avec Eckermann.* He is enthusiastic about Tolstoy, whose *Resurrection* he reads from end to end in two days, and from the reading of which he deducts interesting psychological remarks regarding Maslova, Nekhludow and the solving of the problems of humanity. He has a curious passage regarding Kipling: "It seems inconceivable that a man could have written *The Death of Ivan Ilitch* without having actually died himself and remembering all about it. In the same way I cannot conceive how Rudyard Kipling

can have written such a book unless he was conscious of animal forms he had worn in the past. The book would almost make one believe in metempsychosis."

It is in this Goethe-Eckermann book that a passage occurs that supplies the key, or at least one of the keys, to Léon Blum's attitude towards life: "When you delve beneath the surface, realism is found to be the sole real idealism. You cannot seek for the ideal outside the realm of reality; the ideal is in life; it is life itself. It is faith in beauty, faith in justice. It is the courageous will to bring to maturity the best of men and the best of worlds."

That is the spirit in which Léon Blum wrote what is, from a literary point of view, perhaps the most important of his works, *Stendhal et le Beylisme*. The life of a man he esteemed highly, and his work for which he had intense admiration, are in his mind fused into one inseparable whole. The one is unthinkable without the other. This composite Stendhal, man and work, exercised over Léon Blum an influence that was both lasting and profound. He is aware of it. He confesses it: "We have loved Stendhal; his influence has passed over into our lives; maybe by some secret process of exchange, we have infused into his work a charm that lay in ourselves, in our youth, in our gifts."

This is psychologically of interest. Léon Blum's mind has been greatly affected by books, very

specially so by some books. Disraeli's novels awoke answering chords in his own consciousness. Tolstoy gave flesh to the bones of his own instinctive love of humanity. But in Stendhal he perhaps learned to know himself. Some at least of these dualisms we have noticed in Léon Blum existed in Stendhal—in the man and in his work, that were the complements of each other.

Stendhal's intelligence called aloud for logic and order. Stendhal's sensibility effaced the limits set by his intelligence and opened to him vistas that sometimes appeared to lose themselves in anarchy. Stendhal felt as a very present thing a conflict between the individual and the society of which he is an integral part. Stendhal was a member of the élite and knew he was; but he often felt himself hemmed in by a lack—not of appreciation—but of love on the part of society.

These are the traits that Léon Blum consciously or unconsciously brings out in his masterly study of Stendhal. They are traits that touched himself because they open out problems that, in part at least, were his own. Of course the development of the two men took very different courses. Stendhal remained in the isolation of the élite. Léon Blum stepped from this aristocracy of the mind into the market-place of public affairs. Stendhal remained in a sense the prisoner of his own intelligence; Léon Blum used his intelligence for public service.

In his book, *Les Problèmes de la Paix*, we find Léon Blum in his public service aspect at his best. But, faithful to his axiom cited above, we find him assimilating, or at least trying to assimilate, idealism and realism. There were many to whom the name of Léon Blum was as a household word, and there were some even among his friends who feared lest, when faced with the hard facts of practical politics, he would prove a failure. They admired him as a theoretician. They applauded his idealism. But they had grave misgivings as to the application of his theories and ideals to actual and practical things. The merciless logic of facts has probably by now shown them that they were mistaken. They would hardly have made the mistake at all had they read carefully and intelligently some of Léon Blum's books. Particularly, as far as politics are concerned, his works on governmental reform and on the problems of peace.

The book on peace was published in 1931. Reading it in 1937 many passages seem almost prophetic; but in the light of events they seem to recount a tale of lost opportunities. One passage is worth quoting here because it supplies the key to understanding of the writer's viewpoint in international affairs and of his foreign policy during his tenure of office:

"It is to our interest and it is also our duty to note that, in the Europe and the world of to-day, the cause of Freedom and the cause of Peace are

bound up with each other. Freedom and Peace have the same supporters; the open enemies of Freedom are also the secret enemies of Peace. The governments that stand for Freedom will be strong in the measure in which they deliberately support Peace. The governments that stand for Dictatorship will be threatened in the measure in which, despite their knavish tricks, they shall have been convicted of opposing or delaying Peace.

"France considers herself very specially threatened by international Fascism: let her not hesitate to employ this weapon, for it is surer than either fortresses or guns."

CHAPTER IX

THE WORLD WAR AND BLUM'S FIRST POLITICAL ACTIVITY: 1914–1918

ON THE FIRST of August, 1914, the people of France woke up to find staring at them on every wall the fatal white posters with the crossed tricolour flags: the general mobilisation order. That same day Herrmann Müller, a German Social Democrat deputy who was, in after war days, to be Chancellor of the German Republic, arrived in Paris to confer with the leaders of French Socialism. Years later he told one of the writers of these notes that he had gone to Paris with a mission from his party to arrange with the French Labour leaders, if he should find them so disposed, for joint sabotage of the mobilisation on both sides of the frontier. He added that he found the French so disorganised by the death of Jaurès as to be incapable of taking any decision, so he went back to Berlin empty-handed and Socialists in both countries docilely obeyed the mobilisation orders. The French version of the incident is somewhat different. Renaudel, Bracke and a few more met Herrmann Müller in a committee room of the Chamber. As he could speak no French and they could speak no German, they

asked a young Belgian Socialist who accompanied him to act as interpreter. That young man was Henri de Man who to-day plays a very important rôle in the Belgian labour movement. After a long and desultory conversation Herrmann Müller departed and left them wondering why he had come to Paris at all. He had made no practical proposals. He had vaguely talked round the subject of the impending war and seemed so thunderstruck at the news of the murder of Jaurès and the proclamation of French mobilisation as to be incapable of connected utterance.

Thus did French and German Socialism, despite hours of heated debate at many congresses, despite finely-worded resolutions, despite reams of anti-war printed matter, drift into the world war.

The event struck Léon Blum with mingled incredulity and horror. On the morning of the 2nd of August he went downstairs to Philippe Berthelot to hear the latest news. It was of the very worst. Blum's special friend René Berthelot was there. The two men had not seen each other for a number of years; they fell into each other's arms, overcome by grief. Blum was in a state of depression. It seemed unbelievable that the hideous crime of war should be actually committed. Jean Jaurès' murdered body lay cold and stark. It seemed to Blum that everything was lost, that with the vibrant voice of Jaurès stilled for ever, optimism had fled never to return. These two

catastrophes coming one after the other seemed more than a man could bear. They dispelled all hopes of a better, healthier, saner, happier mankind. Jaurès was dead. Peace was no more. And that dream of a Workers' International that would rise up and render war impossible, had vanished like mist on the rising of the sun. Staunch pacifists rushed about in uniform amid the clatter of arms. The general secretary of the C.G.T. (Trade Union Federation), Jouhaux, had been one of the first to obey the call. The militant columns of pacifist Socialism had disappeared overnight. The only comrades who were not under arms were those whose names the special branch of the police had inscribed on the famous "carnets B"[1]—the Black List and whom a needlessly suspicious Government had promptly cast into jail.

Léon Blum who had, when he had attained the age for military service, been permanently exempted as unfit owing to his extreme short-sightedness, had ample evidence of this dispersal of the Socialist hosts on the fourth of August at the funeral of Jaurès. There were comparatively few people present. In another way the funeral seemed odd. Viviani, the Prime Minister, had practically annexed the corpse of the Tribune of the People. For purposes of war propaganda the Government had taken possession of the very name of the man who had with all his might fought against war, and held him up as a pattern of super-patriotic

LEON BLUM, WITH THE EXECUTIVE OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY, HEADING THE PROCESSION AT THE POPULAR FRONT DEMONSTRATION ON JULY 14TH, 1935

virtues. Maurice Barrès, jingo of the jingoes, was among the first to bow his head in deference at the graveside.

Some, like Blum, may have found it odd, but no one protested. The fever of war had seized the whole people. The idea of the motherland in danger had dispelled all ideologies. And the motherland was in grievous danger.

Across Belgium that was struggling gallantly but valiantly against overwhelming odds, endless grey columns were marching onwards, pushing the British and French before them, smashing up fortresses like matchwood, forcing open with fire and blood a way into the fair lands of northern France, advancing with what appeared to be irresistible force to within sight of Paris.

A tornado of disaster seemed to have struck France. It was felt that much had been left undone, that a firmer grip was required. A Government of National Union was formed. It would have been incomplete without the Socialists. With a heavy heart the Socialists agreed that two of their leaders should accept office in that cabinet. Jules Guesde became Minister of State without portfolio; Marcel Sembat became Minister of Public Works. In an explanation to the French Socialists, the C.A.P., the executive committee of the party, stated that these two Socialists would act as "delegates for national defence" in Viviani's enlarged Cabinet of Sacred Union. It was indeed a time of unexpected fraternisations. Vaillant, who had always

refused to shake hands with "reactionaries" like M. de Mun, could be seen talking amicably with him. For the time being there reigned within Socialist ranks perfect unanimity: national defence killed every other consideration.

Sembat, who had met Blum at Jaurès' house and had been impressed by his intelligence, memory and capacity for work, asked him to be his "*chef de cabinet*". Blum accepted not only without hesitation, but with genuine pleasure. He, like many others in a like position at the beginning of the war, felt keenly that physical disability—his short-sightedness—rendered him unfit for service, and he welcomed an opportunity to do useful work. He had had occasion to learn administrative ropes at the *Conseil d'Etat* and many of the men with whom his new duties placed him in daily contact were already known to him from his activity at the Palais Royal. He did not therefore feel like a fish out of water in his new functions.

In a very short time he got on close terms with his chief—not an easy thing to do, for Sembat was inclined to push reserve to the brink of suspicion. Blum was thus kept informed of the daily developments of the war in a more or less complete way. Rather less than more, for he could only learn that which Guesde and Sembat had been told, and the ministers who belonged to the Right or Centre parties who had not altogether abandoned their distrust of Socialists did not tell their Socialist colleagues everything.

In London, where he had to go fairly frequently, Blum found a very different "climate" and noted with satisfaction that labour leaders were not, by the powers that be, treated as second rate citizens.

His main task was concerned with supplies. He worked very harmoniously with the General Secretary of the Minister of Public Works, M. Mahieu, who was later to become himself a cabinet minister and then a vice-president of the Senate. To this highly capable official he owed a great deal. But Blum very soon contributed ideas of his own; notably one which was to play a cardinal rôle in the prosecution of the war: he proposed to adapt civil industries to the manufacture of war material. This being approved of in principle he set to work with indomitable energy to organise production. In his little office in the boulevard Saint Germain he received leaders of industry incessantly; he received them without regard to rank and standing. In his eyes they were potential instruments to be used and directed. His only criterion was efficiency.

Military operations, however, were taking an alarming turn. The Germans were in Compiègne, in Chantilly, almost at the gates of Paris. M. Millerand, the Minister of War, entrusted the defence of Paris to General Galliéni and the latter demanded the removal of the Government to Bordeaux. Poincaré fought against this demand, but had to give way. For three months the

Government moved to Bordeaux. With them, of course, Léon Blum.

The rot was stopped. With clear vision Joffre seized the psychological moment. The French northern armies, after a series of disasters, the British expeditionary force after a terrible retreat, turned at bay. The battle of the Marne saved Paris. It might have decided the issue of the whole war there and then, had Joffre had enough munitions to push home his advantage.

But munitions and every kind of war material were sadly wanting. It became increasingly evident that the existing means of production were hopelessly insufficient. Blum's suggestion was still at the stage of investigation and preliminary organisation. Then Loucheur stepped in. Louis Loucheur, who on mobilisation had held the rank of a mere artillery lieutenant, had, by some stroke of good fortune for France, been pitchforked into the position of liaison officer between the arsenals and the armies in the field. A staff of colonels worked under the direction of this strange lieutenant. A friend of his, Lazare Lévi, suggested to him the importation from America of fool-proof machinery for the manufacture of war material, that did not require skilled labour, but could be manipulated by women, girls and men unfit for service. Lévi and Loucheur journeyed to Bordeaux to submit this idea to the Minister of War. The usual fate of bringers of new ideas in wartime is to be kept waiting in antechambers and finally to have their

schemes either rejected or pigeonholed. Loucheur was saved from this fate by a friend, Henri Cahen, who had the ear of the Minister of War. Also, perhaps, by the fact that his scheme was a practical application of the principle launched by Blum and under consideration at the Ministry of Public Works.

The Ministry of War gave Loucheur enough orders for war material to justify his opening three "civilian" factories in Paris and one in Lyons. This last was installed in the vast buildings of the Lyons International Exhibition and, thanks to American machinery, was able from 1915 to the end of the war to turn out a daily average of 17,000 shells and other projectiles. The success of the venture proved infectious. Soon every town in France had factories and workshops employing female and non-combatant labour turning out supplies for the insatiable appetite of allied guns. The enterprise grew to such proportions and assumed such cardinal importance for the winning of the war, that it was organised under a separate ministry. It was Albert Thomas, a Socialist deputy and close friend of Blum's, who became Minister of Munitions. With his appointment, in May, 1915, the number of Socialist members of the National Government was increased to three.

Albert Thomas was, however, not content to supervise the making of munitions; he played, or tried to play, an active political part. His attempt

to unsaddle Ribot was not very apparent, but he came out in the open in opposition to Painlevé. He was in this supported by Renaudel, who had succeeded Jaurès as editor of *L'Humanité* and by Blum's chief, Sembat. But Blum, together with Lucien Herr, disapproved of these political manœuvres. He was of opinion that the one thing that mattered was to get on with the war; he realised that the side that held out longest would win and he believed that only work concentrated on the business of war would enable the Allies to hold out.

On the 16th of December, 1916, Guesde and Sembat resigned, and this naturally entailed the cessation of Blum's activities. This was a severe disappointment to him; he keenly resented having to become a mere spectator of the war, the more so since military operations were not shaping well for Allied arms. War weariness was beginning to manifest itself. The outbreak of the Russian Revolution, while it greatly cheered French Socialists, hardly contributed to increasing confidence in the outcome of the war.

President Wilson's Message to Congress and the entrance of the United States into the war came as a much needed tonic. Blum did not share the hopeful expectations events in Russia aroused among his fellow-Socialists, but he greeted with enthusiasm the American decision. He did so not so much because of the new and gigantic asset the Allies acquired—though he by no means

underestimated the value of American assistance —but because he attached vital importance to the moral and political value of the association of the three great democracies, France, Britain and the United States. He had drunk deep at the wells of Anglo-Saxon thought; he had even been accused by some of his friends of "anglo-mania". The idea of close co-operation between the three leading democratic States had always been a favourite conception of his; a conception he was destined to carry into practice in 1936 as head of the Government.

Meanwhile French internal politics had been moving. Clémenceau, the legendary destroyer of ministries, had decided that the time had come for him to form a ministry of his own. He had done assiduous preparatory work. He had, as far as war conditions allowed, systematically criticised and attacked the various Governments in power since the beginning of the war. He had quietly acquired a big and influential following in the Senate. His house became more and more the resort of politicians of nearly all shades of opinion who did not happen to be in office at the time. A sort of Greek chorus of politicians formed itself and started singing on every possible occasion: "Clémenceau is the country's only hope!" The "Tiger" believed in himself. He succeeded in forcing this belief on a somewhat unwilling Parliament. So much so that President Poincaré, whom he had ferociously attacked, had to call upon him

to form a Government. The two men, being in harness together, became comparatively good friends. Clémenceau revised his previous opinion of Poincaré: "He is peerless for putting things in order," he said. "If I get some *dossier* that is muddled up to the point of being incomprehensible, I send it over to the Elysée. And I get it back in a perfect state, with notes that make the whole thing beautifully clear."

The days when Clémenceau was on friendly terms with the Socialists had long gone by, yet he offered them posts in his Government. Renaudel and Albert Thomas, though they had intrigued to get into power, refused because they wanted to embarrass Clémenceau. Blum took the opposite view. He had no love for Clémenceau, but he realised that here was a man with ruthless energy, who commanded a strong following in Parliament, who could ride rough-shod over every obstacle, and who was therefore capable of doing good work towards winning the war. He had never forgiven Clémenceau for his brutal repression of strikes nor for his attacks on Jaurès. But he thought all such resentments should efface themselves in so critical a situation. He therefore urged that the Socialists should serve under him; he argued that Socialist ministers in Clémenceau's cabinet would be a safeguard against Clémenceau's possible abuses. But Blum's voice was not yet listened to in the French Socialist party; his advice carried no weight. The party turned down Clémenceau's

offer. He did not press the matter; he went on with his main business of winning the war.

No easy business. Even with the prospect of American divisions rolling across the ocean.

The chief difficulty came from the division of counsel and aims of the allied and associated powers. Clémenceau, talking to his chief assistant, Mandel, once used a phrase the truth of which, many years later, in a different sphere, Léon Blum was to appreciate: "Now that I know from experience what a coalition really is like I have lost much of my enthusiasm for Napoléon."

But the Blockade of the Central Powers, the advent of the American divisions, the belated but effective unity of command under Foch ended by turning the tide. The bugle call, "Cease fire!" on the eleventh of November, 1918, put an end to hostilities. It was not till many years later that discerning observers were to find out that it had not put an end to the war.

It was not to be expected that a cataclysm like the World War could remain without influence on the evolution of the Socialist movement.

We have noted that, on the outbreak of war, there seemed to be no fissure in the Socialist block in France. Even the wildest anti-militarists had hastened to the colours. The voice of Hervé was stilled and Léon Jouhaux was in field uniform. But as the months of war succeeded each other, a minority movement gradually developed; at first it grouped itself around Paul Faure and

Karl Marx's grandson, Jean Longuet. Renaudel, who had succeeded to Jaurès as editor-in-chief of *L' Humanité*, led the majority, with the assistance of Léon Blum's friend, Albert Thomas; the noted Hellenist scholar. Bracke, who to-day replaces Blum as editor-in-chief of *Le Populaire;* Alexandre Varenne, who was later to blossom forth into a colonial Governor, and a few others.

What separated the two camps was, in an acuter because more urgently actual form, the old conflict between Reformists and Revolutionists, or on a specific point, between Nationals and Internationals.

When Albert Thomas accepted the post of Minister of Public Works in May, 1915, it was with the approval of the party, but the C.A.P., the executive committee, had laid down conditions that expressed the attitude of the majority Socialists towards the war. It was to be a just war to be followed by an equitable peace. The rights of nationalities were to be respected. Arbitration was to be substituted for war in all cases of international dispute, Belgium was warmly patted on the back. The restitution of Alsace-Lorraine was demanded. But the sole indication of fraternisation with the German masses was a greeting addressed to the plucky but tiny minority of German Socialists who, under Karl Liebknecht, refused to bow the knee to the Baal of war.

There were, here and there, some local Socialist Associations that took the view that this attitude

was unworthy of the movement. The Socialist Federation of the Yonne was the first to speak out. Its example was followed by those of the Isère and the Rhône.

At the April, 1916, session of the Socialist National Council, Longuet moved a resolution demanding that relations be re-established with the International. He secured 960 votes and was beaten by 1,996.

The growing horrors of war, the daily accumulation of casualty lists, the steady increase in the cost of living tended to strengthen the minority more and more. The fight between the two sections within the party grew ever more fierce.

Léon Blum had from the start taken the view that national defence must take precedence over all other considerations. His friends Lucien Herr and Andler were of the same way of thinking. Blum was not insensible to the feelings of the minority. The tears of the bereaved, the sufferings of the victims, the privations of the poor aroused his keenest sympathy, but they did not alter his viewpoint, which remained that of the majority.

That majority was, however, finding itself hard pressed and began to make certain concessions to the Longuet faction.

In September, 1915, some French Socialists, acting on their own, had conferred with Italian, Swiss, German and Slav Socialists at Zimmerwald in Switzerland. A year before, Italian and Swiss

Socialists had met at Lugano and in January, 1915, a conference of Socialists belonging to neutral countries had taken place in Copenhagen. But the Zimmerwald meeting was the first contact between labour men of the belligerent countries, since that abortive conversation with Herrmann Müller in a committee room in the Palais Bourbon on the first of August, 1914. It was not an official gathering from the party point of view, but it was none the less significant. The ice was broken. The German representatives at Zimmerwald belonged to the Liebknecht minority. The Frenchmen present were three socialist deputies and some members of the minority group of the C.G.T. (French Trade Union Congress). There were no British Delegates since the Foreign Office had refused them passports. The Italian Socialist party was the only one to be represented officially. Lenin was one of the Russian members of the conference, which passed resolutions condemning the "bourgeois war" and urging international labour solidarity.

The second effort in this direction was made in August, 1916, at Kienthal. The British secured passports this time and duly appeared. The French members were still there as private Socialists and not as spokesmen of their party. It was at this conference that the epithet "social patriots" was first coined, an epithet that, in the course of the unfortunate and venomous controversies that were for years to divide the proletariat, was to evolve

into "social traitors" and finally into "social fascists".

The executive of the French Socialist party formally disavowed those who had taken part in the Zimmerwald and Kienthal conferences. But the three deputies in question, henceforth called the "Kienthal men", formed the nucleus of an extreme left group and voted consistently against all war credits. Léon Blum was not among those who, sometimes savagely, attacked them for this attitude. He did not share their views, but he had to agree that they acted in conformity with the old revolutionary tradition.

The entire conflict, however, filled Blum with grave misgivings, the more so since, very steadily, the minority encroached upon the majority. At the 1916 party congress, the majority only commanded some 1,600 out of 3,000 votes. But that was sufficient to keep things going and to authorise the entrance of Albert Thomas into the Cabinet. Premier Ribot sent him to Russia to bring the greetings of French Socialists to Kerensky, on whom Socialists everywhere founded hopes that were to be cruelly deceived. This journey moved the minority to anger; not that they disapproved of Thomas visiting Kerensky, but because he had done so on the instructions of a "bourgeois" Prime Minister.

The minority indeed was getting the upper hand, its influence in the executive committee was growing daily. At the Bordeaux Congress

in 1917 it succeeded in getting a motion passed authorising the sending of delegates to the International Socialist Conference at Stockholm, where the German and Austrian parties were to be represented.

The point of view of the "Kienthal men" had prevailed over that of Léon Blum, who took part in the Bordeaux assembly. His views were, a month later, to be rejected on another issue: the advisability of accepting Clémenceau's offer of participation in his new ministry. These defeats of Blum at the hands of his own people were hardly surprising. For one thing, he had not had time to acquire authority in the party councils; his name began to be known, but he had had no chance as yet to pull his full weight. Moreover the moderate, reformist, national defence attitude he had adopted was thought to be near akin to that of Kerensky in Russia; and Kerensky saw the stucco edifice he had improvised tumbling about his ears. Lenin and the Russian "minority" seized power.

The effect in France was immediate. There, too, the minority became a majority. At the end of July, 1918, there was a sitting of the National Council of the party in Paris. Longuet's minority motion secured 1,544 against 1,172 for Renaudel's "majority motion". Leadership changed hands. Frossard became General Secretary and Marcel Cachin succeeded Renaudel as editor-in-chief of *L'Humanité*.

These changes were ratified by the party congress in April, 1919, when a resolution was passed that henceforth the Socialist deputies should always vote against military credits.

The time had come when the whole situation could be reconsidered. Rightly or wrongly, Léon Blum had felt that, so long as the fate of the country was in the balance, Socialist aims must be subordinated to national defence. Now that the military issue was settled, he felt free to return to the concentration of all efforts on Socialism.

But he realised that to achieve success in this direction would be difficult owing to the scars left by internal warfare in the party, owing to differences of opinion still persisting in its ranks. The mischievous consequences of this lack of unity had been clearly shown by events during the months that followed the armistice. Spontaneous rebellions took place. The red flag was hoisted on a number of French warships in the Black Sea. French divisions in Southern Russia mutinied because they did not relish the task imposed upon them of protecting the remnants of Russian Tsardom and fighting against the new-born Soviet proletarian republic. In the great French harbours, the dockers and arsenal hands rose. For a while it looked as if revolution were about to break out. But the movements were isolated, spontaneous, without cohesion or central leadership; the party executive, torn with dissensions between Reformists and Revolutionaries,

was unable to give a lead. The whole thing ended in smoke and in heavy terms of penal servitude for the ringleaders.

It was clear to Blum that the first requisite for a renaissance of militant Socialism was the restoration of unity within Socialist ranks. Above all, the healing of the wounds inflicted on each other by the two warring factions.

In this endeavour he laboured hard, and though the measure of success achieved was only partial and temporary, it strengthened his own position in the French Socialist movement and thus evened the path that was, in time, to conduct him to leadership of the party.

CHAPTER X

GOVERNMENTAL REFORM AND THE PEACE

TOWARDS THE END of 1918 a small book entitled *Letters on Governmental Reform* was published in Paris and attracted a great deal of attention in political circles. The book was unsigned, but readers of the leading reviews recalled a series of articles in the *Revue de Paris* on the same topic and immediately recognised the hand of Léon Blum.

The book, which was re-issued in 1936 with some additions, is not only suggestive in a high degree, but it is illuminating as regards Blum's conception of the business of government. It affords strong evidence of that continuity of political thought that is characteristic of the man. Reading it over to-day in the light of political events in France in 1936 and 1937, the observer will find clearly laid down in its pages those principles of administration which it was Blum's endeavour to carry into practice as head of the Government.

For this reason the book is of vital importance for any study of Léon Blum. The fairest and best way to deal with it is to quote passages here and there showing the general line of the author's thought.

After laying down the principle that sovereignty in a democratic State resides in assemblies elected by the people, and insisting on the umpire-like character of the office of Président of the Republic in France, he considers the problem of co-ordination and centralisation of power.

"Ministerial and parliamentary instability and impotency threaten to become public dangers. . . . Public opinion in France has not attained that sentiment of parliamentary loyalty that is so deep-rooted with our friends across the Channel. . . . We must at all costs get out of this chaos. . . . We can modify the methods and the instruments of work. . . . Parliament must remain not only the severe controller but the inspirer of executive action . . . every collective enterprise demands fixed rules and centralised direction. That direction must be assumed by the Prime Minister . . . he must direct the work of Parliament, that is, legislation; he must direct the work of his ministers, that is administration. To recall two English formulas: he must be for his ministers the Premier and for Parliament the Leader of the House . . ."

To do this, Blum argues, the Prime Minister must not combine his office with any other ministry. He must stand over all departments of State as a guide, as an arbiter, as a conciliator and a co-ordinating element. He criticises the French custom of very frequent cabinet meetings that take up a great deal of time but where

vital issues are seldom or never properly discussed.

"The rôle of the head of a Government must be considered as that of head of an industrial undertaking. . . . What is required of him is to assure the coherent and harmonious working of all departments."

He proposes that, in order to meet these requirements, the Prime Minister should be assisted by one or two Ministers of State without portfolios and by what he describes as a "technical council". To the former he could delegate his supervision of this or that question as occasion arises. On the latter he could depend for the smooth running of administrative co-ordination; it could be composed of young members of Parliament who would thus receive valuable training for future office. The idea of the English unpaid parliamentary secretaries to cabinet ministers is visible here.

He deplores the absence in France of what in England is called a "shadow cabinet", ready to step into the shoes of a retiring or defeated ministry. This, he argues, is due to the lack of strong, disciplined and cohesive political parties in France. Incidentally it may be remarked that in this respect there has taken place an improvement since the days when the book was written. In the present Chamber there are at least three well organised and massive parties, all curiously enough belonging to the Left; opposed to them is

a chaotic mass of more or less inanimate groups that have not yet succeeded in fusing themselves into definite political parties.

Throughout this essay on constitutional reform the reader cannot fail to be struck with the frequency of comparisons between French and English political institutions. These comparisons are not only frequent but accurate, and they testify to the profound influence Anglo-Saxon constitutional theories and parliamentary ideas have had on Léon Blum.

These reflections on the absence of a shadow cabinet lead him to criticise the interminable bargaining and remodelling that marks the formation of every new cabinet in France. Instead of "consulting" this group and that, offering this office to this or that politician in turn, the Premier designate should have a clear idea in his mind of the purpose and composition of his cabinet. The list drawn up accordingly should be the subject of straight acceptance or refusal, not of bargaining and negotiating. When Blum had to form his cabinet in 1936, it was on this principle that he acted.

Another suggestion he makes is that of the grouping of offices within the Government. He proposes four such groups: National Defence, Diplomatic Affairs, Political Affairs and Economic Affairs. The head-ministers of these groups would, with the Premier and his deputies (Vice Premier or Ministers of State), form the inner ring of the

Government. In 1936 Blum as far as possible applied this principle to his cabinet.

He argues stoutly against the conception, frequently advocated in France and in England, o appointing so-called technicians to ministerial office. What is required from a cabinet minister is not specialised technical knowledge of his department, but certain gifts of comprehension, of decision, that are applicable to all and any departments.

"I remember smiling," he writes, "when a colleague of mine said with a sigh: 'I had prepared myself for the Ministry of Justice and that of Education—and they have given me the Colonies!' If this good man had been really fit for one task he would have been fit for all of them."

The important thing, he urges, is for the Premier designate to pick out as his collaborators men who have the making of efficient ministers, whatever their department may be. A slightly critical diversion may be permitted here. It has been said that one of the defects of an intelligent man was that he was inclined to believe others to be equally intelligent. This inclination was certainly shared by Léon Blum and it has on several occasions not stood him in good stead. It would be invidious and uncalled-for to cite examples here; but instances will at once occur to anyone intimately conversant with the history of Blum's cabinet of 1936-1937. Doubtless it is true that the idea of appointing "specialists" to ministerial offices is

undemocratic and therefore reprehensible. But intelligence is an elastic term and it contains a variety of departments. An intelligence adapted, say, to the conduct of Foreign Affairs, may not always be efficient when it is applied to Finance and *vice versa.*

In theory, if not in practice, Léon Blum perceived this, for he writes: "It does not by any means follow that the offices can be distributed among them at haphazard like lots in a tombola." And he complains that parliamentary life in France is not conducive to the revelation of special aptitudes. A successful speech, a clever parliamentary manœuvre, may set a man high up in the list of candidates to cabinet rank without his having the qualities required to be an efficient cabinet minister.

He touches on the question of age in politics and advises young men to put a curb on their ambition: "We witness these days an extraordinary degree of impatience on the part of ambitious youth . . . I do not complain of men coming young into office, for to govern is to act, and action without youth is almost always imperfect: but I do complain of youth rising too rapidly and without the indispensable gradations."

Then he deals with the dependence of ministers upon the permanent officials. One of the authors of this study recalls Stresemann giving him an amusing description of those relations: "Permanent officials have two ways of dealing with a new minister. They are both equally deadly.

The one is as far as possible to ignore him—to go on as if he did not exist and only to show him a *dossier* when he positively yells for it. The other is to submit to him every *dossier*, every letter, every scrap of paper, till the poor man is drowned in a sea of paper. A minister who depends on his permanent officials is lost. He must use them, direct them but never depend upon them."

In less caustic form this is also Blum's view. "To depend upon permanent officials and their archives is about as foolish as for the purchaser of a commercial house to depend upon the books of the vendors. He would evidently learn how much he owes, how much is owed to him and how many straw hats were sold yearly: but he would learn nothing of the real movement and life of the business. Permanent officials will supply on demand specific information; they will never supply—because they do not possess—the spirit, the purpose, that make up policy. Or, if perchance they should have a policy of their own that was not that of the minister, they will try and impose that policy upon him."

No one conversant with the inner workings of a ministry—whether it be in France, or in England, or in the United States—will be prepared to deny the truth of the theory formulated so humorously by Stresemann, so clearly by Blum. But alas, at least one important member of Blum's cabinet was, in June, 1937, to find out from bitter experience how true the theory is.

Blum suggests that this potentially evil influence of the permanent under-secretaries might be counteracted by the formation of a ministerial secretariat, recruited somewhat after the same way as his proposed "technical council" to assist the Prime Minister.

He then reviews the relations between the executive and the legislative bodies and sharply criticises the opinion so often heard nowadays: "Let each power confine itself to its own sphere. Let the Chamber vote and the Government govern," and with the true instinct of the Democrat, he writes: "The Chamber governs just as much as the so-called Government, that is the Ministry, and sometimes a good deal more. Ministry and Parliament are not two autonomous machines, but two parts of the same machine, the co-ordinated motions . . . of which should contribute to the same end."

While Blum is a staunch defender of parliamentary institutions, he has no illusions regarding the efficiency of their day-to-day working: "What a consumption of time, of good will, of illusions! What strikes one most is the waste, or at least the disproportion between the effort made and the work accomplished." This state of affairs might be improved in France, he believes, if instead of indefinite groups there were cohesive parties. But the real remedy is elsewhere. The Chamber needs not only a Leader—that is, the Prime Minister, but a Master, who can only be the President of the Chamber.

Thus, while in the executive part of the machinery of government, he wants the powers of the Premier increased, in the legislative assembly he wants the President to have more authority. Here again he is probably influenced by Anglo-Saxon ideas: the Speaker in the House of Commons or in the House of Representatives has a position of much more commanding importance than the President of the French Chamber of Deputies.

In the light of subsequent events special interest attaches to the chapter in which Léon Blum deals with the Senate. The French Senate is elected in thirds every three years by indirect suffrage: the electors being delegates of the local bodies and municipal councils. The distribution of seats is such that the countryside is given representation utterly out of proportion to that of the cities. The Senate therefore seldom represents popular opinion on any specific question at the time when that question is to the fore. But it does at all times and in a supreme degree represent that inert *laissez faire* instinct that makes of France at bottom the most conservative country in the world. Conscious of its lack of popular authority, the Senate has seldom challenged a ministry supported by the Chamber. But it applies to those ministries which it dislikes the very efficient methods of procrastination and persistent postponement of decisions. It does not reject obnoxious Bills; it buries them.

Blum does not discuss the Senate at length.

He dismisses it very firmly but politely with the remark that he does not regard it as having "any direct and normal participation in the business of government. The essential reason for this is that, since the Senate does not fully embody sovereignty, the theory of ministerial responsibility towards it is illusory". It is clear that, in principle, he is a one-chamber man. But, if Senate there must be, then two precautions should be taken. First, a reform of the standing orders imposing a limit upon the time the Senate or its commissions may hold up a Bill sent up to it from the lower house. Secondly, a refusal of the Government ever to put the question of confidence to the Senate. When, in June, 1936, the Blum cabinet faced a hostile Senate, its chief preferred to resign rather than put the question of confidence and thereby recognise to the Senate the right to overthrow a ministry.

The book on governmental reform contains a number of other interesting suggestions, especially regarding reform of the standing orders of the Chamber, but the points just indicated suffice to convey a clear picture of the trend of his thought. It is the thought of a Democrat, anxious not to weaken or destroy parliamentary institutions, but on the contrary to strengthen them and render them more efficient.

If Blum put on paper these suggestive reflections regarding constitutional reform, he did not till much later commit himself to a written treatise

on the peace negotiations and their unfortunate fruit, the Treaties of Versailles, of Saint-Germain and of the Trianon. It is not that he was disinterested nor that he was free from grave misgivings. On the contrary. And, through his friend and neighbour Philippe Berthelot, he was much better placed to know what was going on behind the scenes. His opinion may be fairly summed up in the caustic phrase with which a friend of Loucheur's handed back to the latter a copy of the treaty he had given him to read: "Well, of course it is a treaty. But it is not a treaty of peace!"

In the light of subsequent events it is a pity that Clémenceau did not consult Léon Blum, whose clearness of vision he knew, whose work on constitutional reform he appreciated and of whom he knew that, though a political opponent, he would not have withheld his assistance. But it was the misfortune of the world that the three men who made the Treaty of Versailles—Clémenceau, Wilson and Lloyd George, were, admirable though their respective qualities may have been, opinionated men, stiff-necked politicians who were entirely ignorant of the problems they were attempting to settle. Blum was no specialist in foreign affairs but he had a gift for going straight to the heart of a question, for leaving aside all non-essentials and for coolly estimating practical possibilities. These were precisely the qualities that were most sadly lacking in that aeropagus in Versailles.

CHAPTER XI

BLUM ENTERS PARLIAMENT AND IS CALLED TO THE BAR

WHEN BLUM BEGAN to take a really active part in the life of the French Socialist party, one of the first things that struck him was the absence of a programme. It had, of course, general and theoretical aims. But it never had possessed a "platform". In the words of Amédée Dunois, the historian of the French labour movement: "German Social Democracy had had the Gotha programme, followed by that of Erfurt. But the French Socialist party had contented itself with resolutions passed by the various congresses." To a German party, a programme is as the breath of life: it is a sacrosanct chart, at least until such time as the party gets into office, when it may be conveniently relegated to the limbo of forgotten things. But until that desirable moment has arrived, the party programme is like the catechism—there is no salvation outside of it. Blum had no wish to draft a political catechism, but he urged that a sort of handbook of Socialist doctrine be written, to serve as a guide to parliamentary candidates.

On his suggestion, the party executive, in January, 1919, appointed a commission to draft this

document. Among the fifty-two members were Albert Thomas, Vincent Auriol, Bracke, Cachin, Dunois, Frossard, Paul Faure, Jean Longuet, Renaudel and Léon Blum. Every shade of Socialist opinion was represented, from the reformist Right Wing to the "men of Kienthal". At its first sitting, the commission voted Blum into the chair. This was the first open recognition of Blum's growing influence on the movement. It was also due to the consciousness that he was peculiarly well-fitted to the task: as the political heir of Jaurès he might be expected to avoid the pitfalls of extremism and act as a conciliator; his book on constitutional reform showed that he was an earnest and understanding student of politics; his legal training on the *Conseil d'Etat* was an additional advantage.

In point of fact, except for some minor and mostly merely verbal amendments, the *Programme of Action* adopted by the commission was the work of Léon Blum. It was endorsed by thirty-seven out of the fifty-two commissioners, which fact, in view of the sharp divergences of views and the memories of recent savage disputes within the party, may be taken as evidence of its conciliatory nature.

To analyse this document would take us beyond the range of a biography of Blum. But the reader who cares to study the *Programme of Action* in the light of previous and subsequent events will be struck with the evidence it affords of the continuity

of Blum's political thought from the early days when first he met Jaurès to the days when, as Premier of a Popular Front Government, he shaped the policy of France. Take, for instance, the following typical passages: "Credit shall be organised; agriculture revivified by the application to it of industrial methods; scientific research shall be intensely developed. . . . One must not expect the State to spend less, but to spend more and to better purpose. . . . The number of working hours must be steadily reduced in order to establish a normal relation between the development of technical means and the advantages they should entail for the worker. . . . All branches of training, intellectual and physical, classical, technical and agricultural, must be fused into a unified system of national education that shall be compulsory and free of charge in all its stages. . . . Spare time must be organised by sport, art, the stage, and the diffusion of general and professional culture in all their various forms and adapted to every age."

This, written in 1919, reads like a summary of the legislative and administrative achievements of the Blum cabinet in 1936.

On April 21st, 1919, in a speech of singular power in the course of which he again and again evoked the glorious shadow of Jaurès, Blum moved the adoption of this programme. It was typical for his method of argument that he was not content to justify the draft programme, but stated the case for those proposals of the "men of Kienthal"

that had been rejected with a fairness and clearness that could not have been excelled by the spokesmen of that minority.

The congress adopted the Programme and rewarded its author with the first of these prolonged and enthusiastic ovations to which, in the course of coming years, Blum was to become accustomed. The applause was, on this occasion at least, not a reliable indication of unanimity. It was a spontaneous tribute to a rising hope of the party rather than a full acceptance of his views. For with demobilisation, the party had become flooded with new men, men who had learned to know Socialism in the cruel school of war, men who having for months and years constantly faced death in the trenches were resolved never again to become the dupes of the play of international and financial interests. The congress of 1919 seemed to have restored unity; it recalled the wonderful days of 1905. In reality this semblance of harmony hid profound fissures. The new generation was soon to force the issue. A profound cleavage of the French labour movement was imminent.

By the attentive observer signs of the coming storm could already be discerned. Two months previously an international Socialist conference had been held in Berne. The German and British delegates succeeded in securing a majority that condemned in no uncertain terms the Communist conception of a dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Italian party, which was of the opposite way of thinking, had chosen the curious course of not putting in an appearance. The French were uncertain; but when, at that Congress in April, 1919, the members of the "Committee for renewing international relations" spoke of joining an International, the one they had in mind was the Third International, which had just been founded in Moscow. The Swiss Party in August, 1919, left the Second International to enter the Third where, however, it was to be only a passing guest.

Frightened by these events, the extreme Right Wing of the French Socialist party, the so-called "Free-France" group, seceded. But they were small in numbers and smaller still in influence. To all appearance, on entering the campaign for the general election of 1919, French Socialists formed a solid block under the joint leadership of Longuet and Frossard.

At this election Léon Blum was a candidate. Proportional representation and a redistribution of seats had just come into effect, (incidentally it was to be of short duration) and Paris had been divided into three electoral divisions. Blum was chosen Socialist candidate for the first, or North-East, division.

The Socialist party went into battle on the platform of Blum's Programme of Action. It increased its votes from 1,400,000 to 1,600,000 but, owing to the workings of proportional representation, it obtained less seats than in 1914.

This was a disappointing result. The increase in the Socialist poll was much smaller than many had expected. The reason for this was doubtless that the people were on the crest of a wave of optimism. The crushing load of war had been removed. An intensive propaganda proclaimed, not only in France but in the other allied countries also: "Germany will pay!" A comfortable slogan. The Socialists, who alone raised warning voices against this singularly stupid illusion, were scoffed at. People were busy dancing and celebrating; they resented being disturbed in their auto-suggestion of prosperity.

The Socialist party in the Chamber from 102 declined to 67.

As soon as the news of Blum's election in the first division of Paris was known, Philippe Berthelot hastened to him to congratulate him. Blum was delighted at his success and clasped in his arms the numerous friends who, following Berthelot's example, had filled the library. Madame Blum was the only one who felt misgivings.

The very next day, however, Blum realised that he had an entirely new situation to face. As a member of Parliament he could no longer continue on the *Conseil d'Etat*, and consequently lost the salary that had been his financial mainstay. His wife's fortune was exceedingly modest, and the small allowance made to deputies would be almost entirely swallowed up by expenses connected with his seat.

Political life is not an inexpensive thing. Some way must be found to earn the wherewithal. Blum's first thought was to go back to professional journalism. But it was pointed out to him by a friend that it would hardly do for a rising hope of the Socialist party to have his signature, even if only as a theatrical critic, appearing in *Le Matin*, an organ of reaction. It was the same friend—one of the present authors—who suggested his going to the bar. With his legal knowledge and training, to sit for the bar entrance examination would be a mere formality. He had all the gifts that go to the making of a great advocate. With such assets, his success at the bar seemed assured, together with financial prospects far exceeding those of journalism.

Blum took the advice proffered and, a few weeks later, was admitted to the Paris bar. He met with an immediate success that astonished all but his friends. His extraordinary memory was, of course, of great help. At the *Conseil d'Etat* he had already given evidence of his unusual ability both in grasping the essentials of a legal problem and in presenting them in simple and lucid fashion. Most of his cases were intricate matters of business and finance. He would let his clients speak at inordinate length, explaining their case, heaping up unimportant trivialities; then, in a few words, he would sketch out the real facts: "That is your case!" he would say. The clients were invariably delighted at this quick and accurate understanding.

Not less delighted were the judges who appreciated the clearness of his exposition, his avoidance of all irrelevant details and the elegant phrasing of his plans.

Within a short time, Blum became one of the most sought after barristers for intricate business lawsuits. The more so since he was astonishingly modest in his fees. Again and again, when he had won a case that entailed for his client the winning or saving of very large sums of money, and was asked to name his fee, he mentioned a sum that staggered the client by its reasonableness. When one of his intimate friends remonstrated on such an occasion, he replied: "What the company saved by winning this case has nothing to do with me. I had so much work to do. That work is worth so much. I am not going to ask one franc more."

This partly explains why Blum, though an eminently successful pleader, did not earn at the bar the enormous income of some of his colleagues. There were two other reasons. One was that his Socialism prevented him either from being offered or from accepting many important briefs. Boards of directors of big capitalist undertakings, even though they knew Léon Blum to be the best man they could get to represent them, often refrained from briefing him because, as a politician, he was their natural opponent. And conversely there were banks and big concerns which Blum felt he, as a Socialist, could not with a clear conscience represent in the courts. The second reason was

that his work at the bar, though he quickly got to love it, was a secondary matter in his eyes; it was not an end, but a means to an end. For him at this stage politics had become the all-absorbing care; legal work was only an activity imposed by financial circumstances. So that he carefully avoided allowing his legal practice to grow to a point where it might have interfered with his political activity.

His first appearances, and particularly his maiden speech at the Chamber, made a sensation: it was on the somewhat abstruse and intricate question of railway organisation. During his tenure of office as *chef de cabinet* to the Minister of Public Works he had been brought into contact with the railways question. Tucked away somewhere in that marvellous memory of his, these facts and figures, problems and conclusions lay stored up. This had been supplemented by further experiences as a member of the directing board of the State Railways, a position he had held for some time. During a four hours' speech, without a single note, he gripped the attention of a Chamber that normally would have allowed so dull a debate as that on railways to proceed before half empty benches. Questions of tariffs and freights, of administration reorganisation, of technical progress, of the relations between State Railways and private companies were expounded in so clear and attractive a manner that even the most hardened of his political opponents had to agree that he had never heard these problems discussed

in so masterly a fashion. Monsieur Mahieu, who for twenty years had been permanent under-secretary in the Ministry of Public Works, listened to the speech in the public gallery. Afterwards in the lobbies, he said to some deputies: "The railways question seems to you now very clear and simple. In reality it is one of the most confused and difficult of questions. I thought I was the only man in France who grasped it fully. Since listening to Léon Blum I know I was entirely wrong in that belief."

The speech was vital for Blum's parliamentary career. It revealed to the Chamber the presence of a man whom henceforth no government, no party, could ignore.

Needless to say his own party was delighted. It had already had occasion to appreciate Blum's dialectical ability, his clearness of exposition, his mastery of facts. But never on such a scale nor to such a degree. There was another revelation: many a man had had triumphs before public audiences and party congresses or even at the round table of the party executive, but had failed when it came to handling the Chamber. Here was a man whose maiden speech showed that he was born to the parliamentary manner. Recognition was immediate. He was appointed secretary to the Socialist party in the Chamber.

CHAPTER XII

THE SCISSION OF THE FRENCH LABOUR MOVEMENT

THE YEAR 1920 was to be a decisive one for Léon Blum and for the French Labour movement. Ever since he joined the Socialist party, Blum's dominant care had been to secure and to maintain its unity. The irony of fate was to ordain that it should be he who would, by his decisive intervention at the Congress of Tours, lead a minority of the party into secession. But not into the wilderness. For thanks largely to him, it was, though at the time a minority, to remain the French Socialist Party or, to use the phrase he used and made historic, "the old house", and was in a very short time to become more powerful, more numerous and more influential than the temporary majority at the Tours Congress.

We have seen how the labour movement not only in France but everywhere else was, in those after-war years, though preserving the semblance of unity, rent in twain by the question of Soviet Russia. Was the Leninist attempt at setting up a Communist State in Russia to be considered as a Socialist enterprise? Were the methods employed by Lenin in Russia, and recommended

by Moscow for adoption in every other country, the methods best adapted to achieve success for Socialism? Was universal revolution still and immediately practicable? Were the methods and was the spirit of the Second International sufficient or should they be replaced by the methods and the spirit of Moscow?

The French party had since 1889 belonged to the Second International. But the war, as we have seen, had brought about many changes. There had been an influx of new blood, new ideas, a new spirit. The example of Russia had impressed many. These were impatient to be up and doing. The older hands advised caution; to a certain extent they were influenced by their friends of the Russian Socialist Party who were either in prison or in exile. But chiefly they realised that conditions were vastly different in France from what they had been in Russia and they did not feel inclined to abdicate before the directives from Moscow.

In the end it was decided to send a deputation to Russia to study the situation on the spot and, after conferring with the Third International, to report to a congress of the French Socialist Party, which would then take a decision one way or the other. The delegates were Frossard, who, years later, was to adorn the reactionary cabinet of M. Laval, and Marcel Cachin who at that time was editor-in-chief of *L'Humanité*, the party's official organ. During Cachin's absence he was replaced in that function by Léon Blum.

If Frossard and Cachin imagined they were going to spend their time in Moscow in asking questions and getting answers, they soon found out their mistake. It was the other way about. Boukharine beset them with questions—very definite questions, to which they were expected to reply without equivocation. For instance: "Do you condemn the attitude of the Socialist party during the war, an attitude that was tantamount to treason to Labour?"

"Did Cachin in the course of the parliamentary debates on the May strikes have an interview with the reactionary Barrès in the lobbies?"

This one-sided game of having to reply to Muscovite questions altered the whole character of the Cachin-Frossard mission, which had been intended to be purely informative. Obviously their replies committed to a certain extent the French party. They were no longer merely exploring the ground: they were negotiating an agreement. Apart from that, what Cachin and Frossard saw and heard in the Soviet Union appears to have convinced them of the Socialist reality of Lenin's experiment and of the efficiency of the tactics recommended by the Comintern.

They came back to France convinced advocates of affiliation to the Third International. They had brought back with them an important document: a list of twenty-two conditions insisted upon by the Comintern, to be accepted by all parties desiring affiliation; and they recommended that

these conditions be accepted without hesitation or reservations. Longuet and Paul Faure, with an important section of the party, were in principle favourable, but they wanted some of the conditions to be amended. Blum and Bracke on the other hand were for total rejection of the conditions and for continued adherence to the Second International.

The historic congress of Tours had to decide between these three points of view. Blum had not hesitated one moment in making up his mind; it had been made up before he had read the twenty-two conditions; reading them merely confirmed him in his opinion.

It was not that he was blind to the success attained by Lenin and his comrades. He recognised the greatness of their achievements, the thoroughness with which they had crushed capitalism, the courage with which they were setting to work to build up a new society on the ruins of the old. But the violent means employed revolted him. Not so much the violence applied to fighting reaction, as that used in crushing men who but yesterday had been friends and allies, the Menscheviks, the Russian Socialists. He, who from early childhood had instinctively loathed every form of oppression and tyranny, could not accept the idea even when it was urged in the name of a Dictatorship of the Proletariat. It seemed to him that the treatment meted out to the Russian Socialists was a sort of wilful ferocity for ferocity's

sake. And the idea that this spirit and these methods might take root in France was abhorrent to him.

Of course he knew history; he was acquainted with the Russian tradition of violence. He had traced its echoes in Gogol, in Poushkin, in Tolstoy, in Dostoievsky. He knew the terrible forms it had assumed for generations, the hideous tortures of Siberia, the callous cruelty of the *Okhrana*, the violent reaction thereto of the Nihilists, the blood bath provoked by Gapon, the nameless horrors of the protracted Russian civil war. The tradition, he felt, was not dead. The achievements of the Bolshevik revolution were for him enveloped in a sinister mist of blood and carnage.

He had too logical a mind not to realise that revolutions are not always, not even often, bloodless. You cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs. And, when he thought it out coolly, he was bound to reckon with the possibility that, to achieve its ends, Socialism might in France also have to resort to violence. But, he thought, that would only be if and after all other means had failed and a possessing minority refused to yield to a clamouring majority. Violence, dictatorship would in that case be exerted in the name of a majority, and therefore—in accordance with the cardinal principle of democracy—of the nation. Even so, he hoped with all his heart that this necessity would never arise and that the revolution in France would be accomplished without slaughter.

He was convinced that for French Socialism to link its fortunes with the Communist International in Moscow would be tantamount to giving up all hope of a bloodless revolution in France. The Moscow methods, he believed, were incompatible with his dream of a revolution made by Act of Parliament—a dream he had doubtless conceived in the course of his study of English political philosophy.

He did not condemn Lenin for having had recourse to violence; he acknowledged that he had had no other course open to him. But he was determined to avoid everything that might lead French Socialism to the same *impasse* of having no choice but recourse to violence and, subsequently, to repression.

It was in this frame of mind that he went to the Tours Congress. He was at first, as usual, optimistic. Before the congress opened he believed he would carry a majority of the delegates. When he read the uncompromising twenty-two conditions, this hope was greatly strengthened. But he was swiftly disillusioned.

As soon as the session opened it was clear to anyone able to take the temperature of an assembly, that the congress would accept the Communist conditions. It seemed to Blum that a sort of intoxication had seized the delegates. The Communists had well prepared the ground. Their propaganda had been conducted with great skill, ample resources and indomitable energy.

The spokesmen of the various regional federations succeeded each other at the tribune. Nearly all supported Moscow. Marcel Sembat, who as a Socialist who had been a member of a "bourgeois" ministry, roused the particular ire of the Left, was booed and hissed. Paul Faure had great difficulty in securing a hearing.

Then Marcel Cachin, who was to become leader of the French Communist party, put his case before the congress. He spoke without embellishments, calmly, with the merest dash of disdain in his voice. The audience rose and acclaimed him tumultuously. A motion was passed to have the speech reprinted as a pamphlet.

When Blum rose to speak—intensely nervous, stricken with stage fright as he always is at first on an important occasion—he sensed that the battle was lost before it had begun. No arguments he could produce would sway a majority that, filled with a sort of fanatic hope and trust, had already made up its mind. He spoke out of a sense of duty, without any hope save perhaps that of rallying to his viewpoint as large a minority as possible.

He spoke quietly, clearly, without the slightest attempt at oratorical trickery. His were the words of a cool and collected dialectician; but in an occasional throb of his voice, some nervous gesture of his hands, his friends could see that a very tempest of conviction was raging within him.

"You cannot," he said, "half adhere to Moscow.

It is all or nothing." It was a new kind of Socialism that was being tried out in Russia; in his opinion an erroneous kind.

For his part he was ready to endorse illegal activity, but not clandestine action. He was prepared to accept discipline, but not obedience to "masked leaders". Socialism must obtain power as Guesde had said "by using every means, even legal ones". But, in his view, to obtain power was not the principal aim; the principal one was to transform the social system. An armed struggle against the "bourgeoisie" might have been proper for the Russian proletariat, but not for the French proletariat that had been politically trained for nearly two centuries.

He outlined his attitude towards dictatorship. He accepted the dictatorship of a party or of a class. He rejected the dictatorship of a handful of known or unknown partisans. Nor would he have anything to do with a dictatorship that would outlast the crisis and would grow into a system of government.

"For the first time in Socialist history," he exclaimed, "terrorism is set up not as the resort of the eleventh hour, the last hope of public safety to break down bourgeois resistance, not as a revolutionary necessity, but as a method of government."

Then he passed to the delicate question of national defence. "Not one of us has ever contended that the duty to defend the country is an

absolute and unconditional one. But we have contended that neither is it the absolute and unconditional duty of Socialists to refuse or to abstain from national defence. . . . Even under a capitalist régime it is possible for international and national senses of duty to co-exist in a Socialist conscience."

The whole issue was, he averred, a problem for every man's conscience. "Do not imagine," he exclaimed, "that the vote of a majority can change the state of my conscience. . . . Do you really believe that a mere number has such magic power?"

Towards the end he let a note of pathos creep into his speech: "We are convinced in the depths of our hearts that, while you will launch out on an adventurous course, it is necessary that some one should remain in order to guard the old house. . . . We believe there is at this juncture a question of greater urgency than that whether the Socialist movement shall or shall not remain united; it is the question whether the Socialist movement shall or shall not be. . . . And since this is perhaps the last opportunity I will have of speaking to you, I should like to ask you something—something that in my eyes is of moment. Can we not, we who belong to one side or to the other, contract a supreme engagement? To-morrow we will perhaps be divided: will we stand apart as men who differ in their conception of the interests of Socialism, or will we oppose each

other as enemies? Let us abstain from words that wound and tear asunder, from actions that injure, from anything that would be fratricidal."

This touching speech did not leave the congress indifferent. It did not alter the judgement of the delegates, but it affected their hearts. Some among them voiced this feeling. Among them Frossard. Cachin preserved a decent silence, that may have been a tribute. But the finest tribute came from one of the three "men of Kienthal", the pioneers of the extreme Left, Raffin Dugens. It is worth quoting here:

"You were born in the bourgeoisie and you might have remained there, highly considered for your social situation and your culture. You are an intellectual. Like Jaurès you found your way to Socialism. You have brought to that proletariat to which I and all those I love—father, mother, brothers, sisters—belong, the help of your knowledge and of your devotion. Well! I say that when a man sacrifices—as Jaurès did—all his relations to fight for the proletariat, that man has a right to be respected. It may be that I shall be one of those who, by their votes, will render the atmosphere of the French Socialist party intolerable for your lungs. And you will leave it. But I remain convinced that, from the Tribune of the Chamber, you will continue, without thought for your to-morrow, to defend that which you have defended in our ranks. And I will continue to give you my affection."

There must be few instance in political history where a man who, whether for good or for ill, led a secession from a great party, earned by the very speech that consecrated the secession, so splendid a tribute from a sincere and wholehearted opponent.

The speech, however, did not materially influence the vote. Another factor did, to a certain extent: a telegram from the Comintern demanding that Longuet, Paul Faure and their friends be expelled from the French Socialist party. This group, it will be recalled, was by no means opposed to joining the Third International; they merely had some reservations to make on certain points. Many of them would probably, in the final division, have cast their votes for Moscow. This imperious telegram made that impossible. It is by no means clear what the motives of the authors of the telegram were in demanding the expulsion of potential allies. Perhaps it was the result of erroneous or insufficient information; perhaps it was due to a complete misunderstanding of French psychology.

Mistral rose immediately to move that the congress maintain the unity of the party and reject the demand for exclusion of the Longuet-Faure group.

In the night of December 29th to 30th, 1920, the decisive division took place. The Frossard-Cachin motion secured 3,208 votes; the Longuet motion 1,022. Léon Blum had withdrawn his own motion and, with his friends, abstained; they numbered 397 votes.

Thus was the French Socialist movement rent in twain. The majority naturally inherited the whole of the party machinery, the funds, the offices and the newspaper *L'Humanité*. It adhered to the Third International, and though its official title was "Parti Socialiste Français (Internationale Communiste)" it became known as the French Communist party.

The minority did not feel itself thrust out of the Socialist movement; on the contrary it believed itself to be the real carrier of the movement. Léon Blum in his speech had given the keynote when he spoke of guarding "the old house". The speech indeed was published under that title as a pamphlet and distributed in hundreds of thousands of copies. The minority continued to adhere to the Second International and called itself the "Parti Socialiste Français (Internationale Ouvrière)".

For fourteen years, until the Fascist attempt to overthrow the democratic republic on February 6th, 1934, led to unity of action and by degrees to the Popular Front, the two rival sections of the French Labour movement were to spend their time and energies in fighting each other. The statesmanlike appeal in the closing sentence of Blum's speech to the Tours Congress was left unheeded. Harsh words and harsher deeds became the order of the day. The fratricidal feud was carried on with an unparalleled degree of ferocity —to the extreme delight and substantial profit of the enemies of the Labour movement.

CHAPTER XIII

BUILDING UP A NEW PARTY

THE MEN WHO trooped out of the Tours congress, leaving the Communists in possession of the field, were at first nonplussed. Traditional adherents of the democratic system of majority rule, they were shocked by the discovery that for once the majority had been against them and that, as a result, they found themselves in the outer darkness as far as the party tabernacle was concerned. Some went so far as to doubt whether, after all, they had not been mistaken; whether on this occasion, too, the majority did not have right on its side. Others believed the dissension to be only a passing one and hoped against hope that the erring majority would ruefully come back to the fold. Some, more discerning, sought comfort in the thought that, though they had had the majority of the congress against them, they probably had a majority of the masses in the country behind them. Others again, profoundly discouraged, felt like throwing up the sponge and retiring from active politics.

The first task Blum imposed upon himself was to restore self-confidence and cohesion. He exhorted them not to mind their defeat; they, and not their

victors, held the ark of the covenant, the true Socialist faith. They had not left the Socialist party: they *were* the party.

Alas, except in Blum's vivid and inspiring words, there was little left that resembled a party. The funds, the organisation, the offices, the newspaper —all were the spoils of the victors. All these things had to be created anew.

Their creation was the next task he set himself. The local Socialist federations had been split from top to bottom; out of the minority, new federations had to be formed. A party organ must be founded to take the place of *L'Humanité*. A new Youth organisation must be built up to supply a steady stream of recruits to the party. New men must be picked out and trained to make them fit for office in these new formations of militant Socialism.

In some ways the situation proved less difficult than had appeared at first sight. Many men who, at Tours, had voted with the majority, repented when they saw that, instead of continuing the Socialist party they had created a new group— the Communist Party. Others found the rigorous Communist discipline uncongenial. These men little by little dropped out or were expelled by Frossard and Cachin. Divergences of opinion began to make themselves felt in the Communist ranks. These circumstances led to a steady draining of the Communist party, a steady reinforcing of the Socialist ranks. Gaston Bergery, who has occasional

happy inspirations in his speeches, once said: "Between 1920 and 1934 the French Communist party was not a party; it was a sieve." What fell through the holes of the sieve mostly gathered in the rival Socialist party.

What of the men who had walked out at Tours and who helped Blum build up the party? There was in the first place Blum's former ministerial chief, Sembat, whose admiration and friendship for his former lieutenant increased daily. Then there was Jules Guesde, whose advice was of untold value. But both Sembat and Guesde were sick men; from 1921 onwards ill health steadily reduced their combative power. Bracke had been greatly struck by Blum's handling of the Tours situation and, as one of France's leading Hellenist scholars, he could not fail to be attracted by Blum's classical culture. Though he had formerly not always seen eye to eye with Blum in party matters, he now became one of his most loyal co-workers. Albert Thomas was in a great measure the prisoner of the International Labour Bureau in Geneva; but he had not wholly given up hopes of playing an important part in the recast party; he was genuinely fond of Blum and, after a while, frankly accepted to serve under him. Paul Faure was more the type of the ideal party secretary than that of the leader. Renaudel doubtless expected the leadership; but his views in this respect were not shared by the majority of the influential members of the party. By and by he, too, bowed to the inevitable

—at least till, years later, he headed a secession the sterility of which broke his heart.

Blum's bid for leadership was in these circumstances no conscious bid: he grew into the leadership without effort save that which he incessantly and loyally made for the success of the common cause. His eye had to be everywhere; and it was. He took over *Le Populaire*, which, debt-laden as it was, became the party's official organ, guided its first halting footsteps and gave it lustre by contributing a leading article to every number. He intervened as conciliator and arbiter in a thousand petty quarrels. He hastened from one end of France to another, grouping adherents, founding or reforming federations, advising local committees, addressing mass meetings. He spent hours talking to working men, discussing with them the fundamentals of Socialism, their family budgets, their grievances in workshops and factories. For the first time he, the intellectual, found contact with the working masses. He grew to know the working man, to understand him, to appreciate him, to love him. It was for him a priceless education, and the one he had up till then needed to fit him to become the leader of a proletarian party. He attended regional conferences and party congresses. He led the party in the Chamber and was indefatigable in debate, in the commissions, in the lobbies. Of course, he was not the only one who toiled at pulling the Socialist cart up the hill; but he took the lead, he pulled more than

his share. He was that one horse that is always found in a team, that does more work than any of the other horses.

This activity was not always peaceful. The scission of Tours had left bad blood. *L'Humanité* scourged him daily. Whenever he appeared in a public meeting, Communist hecklers and contradictors sprang up with merciless pertinacity. Sometimes unruly elements, stung to frenzy by his acid replies, would seek redress in physical force: blows were exchanged; a dead set would be made at Blum. He was extremely shortsighted and therefore at a disadvantage in a close fight and, though fairly tall, he could ill match himself with some of these herculean stevedores and miners who attacked him. But his courage never failed. He stood his ground.

It was a savage kind of warfare. For years the French Labour movement was a prey to that self-destructive madness that in other countries, in Germany for instance, was to absorb the energies of the proletariat to such an extent that when the Fascist attack came, it found the gates unguarded. It is of little use to try to apportion the blame for this fratricidal ferocity. There were culprits on both sides. There was lack of understanding on both sides.

Whatever may be thought of the attitude Blum took up in the controversies of this period, there is one reproach that cannot in fairness be levelled at him. He never struck below the belt. And even

in the heat of controversy he preserved that serenity of temper, that clearness and elegance of diction that have always distinguished his public utterances.

This manifold activity, so intensely pursued, so ardently combated, could not but secure for him universal recognition among the Socialist masses. Within three years of the Congress of Tours, Léon Blum had become in effect the leader of the party.

It was no longer a mere undisciplined and halting congregation of dissentients; it was now a regular party, growing apace both in numbers and in influence. At the congress held in February, 1922, the growth of the party was clearly revealed. At the 1924 Congress in Marseilles it was found that the party's membership had doubled. Meanwhile the membership of the Communist party had shrunk from 130,000 to 48,000.

The C.A.P., the party's executive, had been recast. Among its members, besides Léon Blum, were Sembat, Guesde, Renaudel and Paul-Boncour. Paul Faure had from the first been appointed general secretary; he holds that office to this day.

Friendly relations had been established with the C.G.T., the French Trade Union Congress, though the constitution of the C.G.T. forbade affiliation with any political party. The French Trade Unions movement had, however, experienced a scission parallel to that of the political movement. For sixteen years, two rival bodies existed side by

side—or rather one against the other: *the Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire* (C.G.T.U.) which adhered to Moscow, and the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (C.G.T.) much the stronger body, which, under its leader Jouhaux, adhered to Amsterdam. Blum's excellent personal relations with Jouhaux date from these years of conflict following the Tours Congress.

The question which International to join had, after some discussion, been settled by the French Socialist party. The Third International was, of course, out of the question since this was precisely the point on which the split had taken place at Tours. A limping kind of International, frequently called "the Second and a Half" had been formed in Vienna under the influence of the Austro-Socialist leaders Adler and Otto Bauer who, while they dreaded the radicalism of the Third International, were dissatisfied with the luke-warm reformism of the Second. At first this appeared a suitable atmosphere for the French Socialist party. But after a brief trial it was found that the Vienna venture was hopeless, and the party returned to the fold of the Second International. Blum's excellent personal relations with both Adler and Vandervelde, the moving spirit of the Second International, enabled him to play the part of mediator between them. Adler shook hands with Vandervelde and no more was heard of the "Second and a Half" International.

The fight between the two parties in France

had its parallel on a world scale in the rivalry between the Second and the Third Internationals. It is interesting to note that, though the fratricidal warfare in the French labour movement was carried out with ruthless ardour, it was, many years later, from France that the movement for unity was to come. And even in the bitterness of the fight there were authoritative voices within the French Socialist party that expressed the wish for union. Witness Jules Guesde who, in a letter that appeared in the *Echo du Nord* on October 14th, 1922, did not hesitate to write: "There is room only for a single International born of contact and agreement between all the Socialist parties of the various nations. It would be the duty of the French section as it would be to its honour, to convene without loss of time a preparatory conference, without drawing any distinction between the Russian Communist Party, the English Labour Party, the Belgian Workers Party and all others."

This pious aspiration for unity could not but be shared by Blum. But years of embittered strife were to roll by before, under the menace of Fascism, the opportunity was to come to take practical steps in this direction.

Parliamentary events were slowly but surely working up to that clash between Fascism and Democracy out of which unity of action, if not organic unity, was to spring.

From 1919 to 1924 the fight was one of opposition to the National Block. Common adversity

drew the two main opposition parties together—the Socialists and the Radicals. Blum, whose leadership of the group in the Chamber asserted itself with ever increasing power, aimed at a closer connection than mere mingling of voting cards in parliamentary divisions. It was largely due to his efforts that, on the eve of the 1924 general election, the so-called *Cartel* was made between Socialists and Radicals. The *Cartel* was an electoral alliance. It did not entail a coalition in the event of victory at the polls, but it was nevertheless to dominate the constellation of French parliamentary parties till the Fascist crisis rendered other methods imperative.

With might and main, from the tribune of the Chamber, in great public meetings, through his leaders in *Le Populaire*, Blum waged untiring war on the *Bloc National* governments. He attacked both that headed by Millerand, the erstwhile Socialist, and that led by Poincaré. He fought them on home and financial policy; he fought them on foreign policy. He attacked the petty attitude adopted by France towards the struggling young German republic; he denounced the occupation of the Ruhr as both a crime and a blunder. Against Poincaré he was particularly acid. He did not actually charge Poincaré with having caused the war, but he said that if Poincaré had been in office in 1887 when the Schnaebele incident occurred, war would have ensued between France and Germany. The predominantly Nationalist

Chamber winced under his attacks; it roared in anger, it made the lids of the deputies' desks clatter like machine guns. Again and again pandemonium broke out, Blum faced it, leaning on the tribune desk with both arms, waiting for a pause in the storm, to launch some new shaft, more deadly than the last.

He imposed himself on a hostile house. To such an extent indeed that some men of the Right and the Centre, having failed either to defeat him in argument or shout him down, tried to win him over. There were plenty of precedents; there were to be plenty of future cases of treason, Millerand, Viviani, Briand, Laval, Doriot, had all started as members of a revolutionary party, to end as honoured members of a *bourgeois*, in some cases even, of a Fascist party. Offers galore were made to Blum; indirect and direct; offers that appealed to a cupidity he did not possess, or to an ambition that was circumscribed by his loyalty to Labour. He did not even trouble to reject them. He just smiled contemptuously and passed on. To his intimates he merely expressed mild astonishment that such errors in psychology were possible. The chief of these errors, as a matter of fact, was committed by a deputy whose name stands for millions.

Léon Blum kept on attacking the short-sightedness of the National Governments. He exhorted them to distinguish between imperialistic Germany and the Weimar Republic. He warned them that

one could not with impunity carry out an eternal vendetta. Some of his speeches, read in the light of subsequent events, seem prophetic. Hitler had as yet hardly emerged from his native darkness, yet in Blum's speeches one may divine the shadow of Hitler. This Central European Mahdi, like all Mahdis, has many fortuitous circumstances to thank for the success he was to attain; but there can be no doubt that among these circumstances pride of place can be awarded to the shortsighted policy of the Bloc National cabinets against which Blum thundered in vain. How clearly Blum perceived the danger may be seen by referring to his leading articles in *Le Populaire* from 1922 to 1924.

The 1924 elections showed that a majority of the French electorate was of Blum's way of thinking in this matter; a way of thinking fully shared by Edouard Herriot, the trusted Radical leader. The *Cartel*, which had been endorsed at the Socialist party congress in February, 1923, obtained a majority in the Chamber. The proportional representation experiment having been deemed a failure, the electoral law had been changed once more. Blum stood for the XXth division of Paris and was duly elected.

From the outset, the *Cartel* had to face heavy odds. M. Millerand, who had meantime run the whole scale of colours from deepest red to the most reactionary white, was President of the Republic. As such he was supposed to act as an

umpire. He chose to act as a party politician. Since the fight of Gambetta against the Marshal President MacMahon in 1877, there had been no clash between the chief of state and the Chamber majority. Gambetta had driven the Marshal into an impasse, expressed in the historic phrase: "*se soumettre ou se démettre*" (yield or quit), and MacMahon had chosen the latter.

Millerand's fate was even worse, for he was forced first to submit and then to quit. He was compelled, much against his will, to entrust the formation of the cabinet to M. Herriot as leader of the strongest party in parliament. But M. Herriot, in full agreement with Léon Blum, refused to accept this commission from a President who had given evidence of unconstitutional partiality. No choice remained to M. Millerand; his tardy submission did not save him; he had to resign.

The *Cartel* of Left parties put up the distinguished mathematician Painlevé for the Presidency, but he was out-manœuvred by the President of the Senate, M. Doumergue, who secured election at the Versailles National Assembly. Not for the first time, nor for the last, did the Senate intervene to check the will of the people expressed at the polls. Blum, who was in 1937 to meet with his first serious check at the hands of the Senate, on this occasion raised a warning voice.

Herriot formed the cabinet. Neither he nor Painlevé, who succeeded him, offered participation in the Government to the Socialists. Had

the offer been made, it would have been refused; at that time only two of the leading French Socialists, Paul Boncour and Alexandre Varenne, would have advocated participation.

In 1924, as later, Blum was opposed to Socialists entering a *bourgeois* Government, but he successfully urged upon his party loyal support of the Radical cabinets. The party had conscientious objections to voting for a budget which included items that, in the Socialist view, served imperialistic ends. But in everything else it supported the Left ministries until the hybrid combination Caillaux-Briand came into office.

This period was marked by one public ceremony in which Blum took a prominent part and which lay very close to his heart—the transfer of the ashes of Jean Jaurès to the Panthéon, the last resting place of the great men of France. This was the occasion for an imposing display of strength by the Left-minded people of Paris. It was the first of these processions of hundreds of thousands of Socialists, Communists and Democrats of all shades that were, in later years, to play so impressive a part in French internal politics.

Though Blum led his party in support of the Radical administrations, he was by no means satisfied with their policy. He warmly welcomed Herriot's reversal of the Ruhr policy and the new wind that blew, though feebly, in Franco-German relations. But he vainly appealed to his old firmness. Especially so in his attitude towards

high finance. How right Blum was in his appeals is proved by Herriot's own subsequent confession that he as Prime Minister of France had to blush with shame at the language he had had to bear from the Governor of the Bank of France.

It was that "*mur d'argent*" that brought Herriot to a fall. Briand, who was asked to succeed him, invited the Socialists to join the cabinet. Following Blum's lead, the Socialists refused. It was for him a matter of principle, not of personal objection. He had never cared unduly for Briand; he instinctively feared his slippery, adroit ways; he never succumbed to Briand's great personal charm, though he was not insensible to it. But he honoured him for the great fight he put up for peace, and with every fibre of his being, to the very last, he supported the foreign policy of Briand, though, rightly or wrongly, he always had the feeling that Briand's pacifism was a sort of auto-suggestion born rather of tactical skill than of idealism.

Supporting Radical cabinets became for so convinced a Pacifist as Blum an almost impossible proposition when France embarked on a warlike policy in Morocco. Neither could he endorse the financial acrobatics of that eternal dandy of French politics, M. Caillaux. Blum led the revolt of his party against this policy; Caillaux found compensating support on his Right for the votes he thus lost on his Left. For the moment his ministry survived; but he inscribed on the tablets

of his memory the first black mark against Blum's name.

The *Cartel* lingered on but only on paper. It had been wounded almost to death by the Radical leaders who were dominant at the moment. The Radical party in France is a conglomerate rather than a party; it represents a tradition rather than a policy; the cement holding together its ultra-conservative Right Wing, its Whiggish centre, its socialising Left Wing, is that of anti-clericalism. When clericalism is not a live issue, the cement softens. On such occasions Conservatism often tends to take the upper hand. It did so on this occasion.

When Briand brought home the Pact of Locarno, however, Blum led the Socialist rally to his support. By some strange aberration, the Communist vote was cast against the treaty.

The fall of the Painlevé-Caillaux ministry on the 22nd of November, 1925, led to keen controversy in the Socialist ranks. Renaudel and his friends came out openly for Socialist participation in the Government. Faithful to his principles, Blum resisted this demand and, with the help of Paul Faure, succeeded in beating the participationists.

The French financial situation had, since the war and partly as the result of it, grown from bad to worse. The supreme stupidity of reparations and the vindictive policy pursued by the Nationalist cabinets towards Germany had not helped mend matters. Briand's resolute conciliation

policy would normally have gone a long way towards restoring public confidence, without which no improvement in the financial situation could be expected. But what M. Herriot called the "*mur d'argent*" once more barred the way to progress. It opposed a sullen passive resistance to the Government's financial proposals. Day by day the Right Wing of the Radical party and the neighbouring Centrist groups became estranged from the cabinet they had been elected to support. When it came to endorse drastic measures against the tax dodgers, the Chamber refused.

Briand tried to form a so-called cabinet of union for the defence of the Franc, intended to comprise all shades of opinion between Poincaré on the Right and Herriot on the Left. But both these men refused their collaboration.

A new Briand-Caillaux cabinet, much more Caillaux than Briand however, was short lived. Blum opposed it with might and main. He profoundly disliked the dictatorial tendencies of Caillaux. In July, 1926, the cabinet succumbed under Blum's repeated blows.

Caillaux swore revenge. He waited nearly eleven years to "get even" with Blum.

The participation comedy started all over again when Herriot called upon the Socialists to help him form a Government. Renaudel, who on this occasion had enlisted the aid of Vincent Auriol, fought hard for participation. Blum again defeated him. The Socialist party, he felt more strongly

every day, must preserve its liberty of action. It must only join a Government when it was strong enough to lead that Government. This firmness of attitude on Blum's part supplies the keynote to the history of French Socialism during the whole of this period. In Germany, in Austria, in Belgium, the Labour or Social-Democrat parties joined coalition Governments. The result was in every case failure, in some cases disaster. Socialists incurred the whole odium for the policy of Governments in which they had participated, though they had always been too weak to impose their own policy on these Governments. They incurred all the risks without the slightest guarantee or the slightest advantage. They made it possible in Germany, for instance, for Hitler to say: "For fourteen years the Socialists have been in power. See what a mess they have made!" In reality some Social Democrats had been in office during part of the time, but not for a single day had German Socialists been in power, and not a single piece of Socialist legislation or administrative reform had it been able to impose on its allies.

Blum was keenly conscious of such a danger. Socialism must come into office with its hands free—if with partners then on at least equal terms with these partners—or it must not accept office at all. It is this sound principle and the resolute way in which it was adhered to that saved French Socialism from being so weakened, so confused,

so discredited that when the Fascist onslaught came it was unable to put up effective resistance.

Herriot formed his cabinet without Labour. He fell a few days later, on July 27th without having compromised Labour. He fell a victim more to the clamour of a reactionary mob in the street than to reasoned opposition in the Chamber. Those demonstrations were the preliminary canter of the Leagues, in preparation for the great coup they were to attempt in February, 1934.

It had been easy for Right demagogues to stir up a mob with the Franc at 248 to the pound, with a cyclone of panic sweeping the Bourse, with the spectre of a bottomless inflation after the German pattern stalking about the land.

The Right came into its own. Poincaré formed a cabinet of National Union. Conservatives like Tardieu and Louis Marin rallied to his call. The Radical leaders, Herriot, Painlevé and Sarraut agreed to serve under him. Poincaré did not ask the Socialist party to join this family gathering; he contented himself with offering a portfolio to one leading member of the party, M. Paul-Boncour, who politely declined.

The defection of the Radical leaders had killed the *Cartel*. Truth to tell it had been lying on its deathbed for some time past, and had hardly responded to Blum's persistent efforts to pump oxygen into it.

How Poincaré stabilised the Franc is a matter of history. He had the famous "*mur d'argent*"

at his back instead of in front of him, barring his way.

With but the handful of Socialists behind him, Blum took up the fight against Poincaré. He esteemed the man for his many personal qualities, his directness, his downright honesty. But this made no difference to the vigour and constancy of his attacks on his policy.

Poincaré was in some ways a big man. Unlike some others, such as Caillaux, he took no offence at Blum's political hostility. On the contrary, he esteemed him the more for his courage, and on several occasions went out of his way to pay tribute to the loyalty and honesty of Blum's activity as practically the sole Leader of the Opposition.

CHAPTER XIV

VICISSITUDES

BLUM'S SUCCESS IN building up the Socialist party had made him a thorn in the side of the Communists, who saw the fruits of their Tours victory rapidly evaporating. His fighting leadership of the opposition in the Chamber had made him no less obnoxious to the supporters of the Government. In these circumstances it is hardly astonishing that both sets of opponents should have made a determined effort to secure his defeat at the General Election of 1928.

The Communists put up against him in the XXth division of Paris one of their ablest men, Duclos, an ex-pastrycook who was, later on, to become Vice-President of the Chamber. From the outset it was clear that Blum would have to fight every inch of the way. Some of his friends advised him to give up what seemed a hopeless attempt since the Right votes would on the second ballot be cheerfully given to the Communist rather than allow the hated Socialist leader to be elected. He was offered candidatures in perfectly safe constituencies. But he decided to fight it out. To those who reminded him that absence from the Chamber would gravely affect not only his

career but his usefulness to the party, he replied that there were some things more damaging than electoral reverses—notably running away from a fight.

A terrific election campaign ensued. It was with the greatest difficulty that Blum secured a hearing. His meetings in schoolrooms were packed beforehand with vociferating, hostile audiences. But the catcalls and booing of his opponents were not the worst impediments; more difficult to meet was a whispered campaign of slander that set in from all sides. He chose to treat it with silent disdain; it appeared to him to be too ridiculous to deserve attention.

The result of the first poll gave Blum 7,714 and Duclos about 6,000 votes, but the issue lay in the hands of the Right electors whose candidates had been among the "also rans". Again Blum's friends urged him to give up the contest. Under French electoral law, in the interval of one week between the two ballots, new candidatures may be put. In several constituencies where the Socialists were in a favourable position for the second ballot, their candidate was ready to stand down in his favour. But again he declined. He would see the thing through to the bitter end, he said. The end was sufficiently bitter. The support of the reactionary voters brought Duclos' total up to 8,199. Blum was beaten. *L'Humanité* triumphed the next morning; but so did the *Echo de Paris*, the *Matin*, the *Journal* and all the

Press organs of vested interests and political reaction.

The Socialist leader was defeated, but the Socialist party achieved a very substantial success. Its vote increased to 1,700,000 and it secured 104 seats in the new Chamber. This achievement was all the more notable since the Communists had maintained even hopeless candidatures at the second ballot, and the Labour vote was thus split. These curious tactics did not bring much profit to their authors, for the number of Communist deputies returned was only twelve.

Delighted as he was at this electoral success of the party he had worked so hard to organise, Léon Blum could not but be painfully affected by his own defeat. It was not only the fact that he had been subjected to obloquy and insults by men who had once been his comrades, nor that he had been defeated by unfair and unlovely methods; he was getting used to that by this time, as everyone must who is in the rough and tumble of political life. But what grieved him especially was that he was no longer in the Chamber, that he who had been on the bridge no longer had access to it. He looked at the Chamber as a disabled old sea-captain gazes upon the sea. In his heart of hearts he had little doubt but that one of the new deputies would offer him his seat. Hints of this were to be read here and there in the Press, but none of the 104 Socialist deputies offered to sacrifice himself. And he was not

the sort of man to ask for favours or even to hint at them, even in conversation with intimate friends.

He felt his momentary incapacity keenly. Devoted to his party, he knew that he could serve it best in the parliamentary arena. He had always had a gift for finding his feet rapidly in any new environment. Though his parliamentary experience had in reality not been of long duration, he felt himself to be an old parliamentary hand and he missed the life, the atmosphere of the Chamber. He loved, too, the spectacular or perhaps it were more accurate to say the emotional side of Parliament. Here one encounters yet another of these dualisms in which his nature abounds. His oratory is, as we have noted, anything but emotional: it relies upon facts and logical deductions to convince. His legal work did not run along spectacular lines, but on the contrary was serried and technical to a degree. Yet there is in him, below this superstructure of refined culture and deep thinking, a tremendous latent fund of sentiment, not to say of sentimentality. When he stood up at the *Conseil d'Etat* it gave him a half unconscious thrill to do so as the authorised representative of the Government of the Republic, and he loved the feel of the robe of office he wore. When he appears in a hall packed with the people he has made his own—the workers, the poor, the disinherited, he flushes with pleasure at the warmth of their welcome. And when, as Prime Minister of France,

he rose on some solemn occasion, he had a sense not only of responsibility but of emotion.

The gap left in his daily life by absence from Parliament gave him more time to devote to his friends than had been possible for several years past. Yet he received fewer friends than before; for he was becoming more and more absorbed by care for his ailing wife. This circle of friends was narrowed down. It included Professors Langevin and Perrin, Madame Curie and her daughters, Einstein to whom he had drawn near at the *Foyer Juif* in Zurich, the poetess Madame de Noailles and André Gide. And of course the old inner circle of his intimates: Andler, Tristan Bernard, Porto Riche, the Natanson brothers.

Life in the Montparnasse home had become streaked with sunshine and shadow. For the sunshine Robert Blum's baby daughter Catherine was greatly responsible. Catherine Robert Léon Blum was born on May 28th, 1928. As soon as she could babble a few words she decided that the proper name for her grandfather was "*ami*", and "*ami*" he has remained for her to this day. She never calls him by any other name. The little girl was not only dear to him for her own sake, but for that of her parents—his son of whom he was justly proud, and his daughter-in-law Renée, of whom he grew to be fonder daily.

The shadows were due to the health of the woman who for so many years had been at his side, trusty, loyal and attentive. She was suffering

from a slow disease that baffled the doctor but was probably a form of pernicious anæmia. Anxiety for her was never absent from Léon Blum's mind, and he spent much thought and time in caring for her and surrounding her with kindness and little marks of attention.

There were other reasons for sombre thoughts. In the circle around Blum, these years brought many deaths that affected him keenly. In the first place that of his father to whom he had since early boyhood been devoted. He had respected and loved his mother; he had always been a dutiful son to her. But a great tenderness united him to his father, and his father's death in 1921 had left a much greater void in his life than had the loss of his mother in 1914. As long as his father was alive Léon Blum, busy though his life was, never let a single day go by without spending at least an hour in his company.

In July, 1922, Jules Guesde died. He had been, after Jaurès, Blum's closest political friend. He had welcomed young Blum on his joining the French Socialist party he had done so much to create, to unite and to stabilise; he had guided his first footsteps in political affairs. Blum had greatly prized not only his friendship but the nobility of his character and the brilliance of his intelligence.

Two months later Blum stood by the graveside of another comrade to whom he was bound by very close ties—Marcel Sembat, who had been

his ministerial chief, whose cleverness delighted him, whose culture matched his own and who had watched over Blum's career with a fond care that was almost paternal. The death of Sembat was a double tragedy, for his wife only survived him by thirty-eight hours. To her his death meant the end of all things; she had made up her mind to follow him. Blum was with her before the last. He sensed the impending drama. Passionately he fought to divert her from her resolve. But while he argued and pleaded, he felt it would all be in vain.

The year 1924 brought the death of Lenin. Blum had never met the man who laid the foundations of the Soviet State. He shared his idealism though he often disagreed with his methods. He, the defeated of Tours, might have had reason to feel aggrieved with Lenin; if he ever felt anything of the sort the sentiment had been dissipated by the consciousness that out of the apparent defeat of Tours a vigorous, revivified French Socialist party had been born. And at bottom nothing could erase Blum's admiration for the man Lenin. For days his thoughts were in sorrowing Moscow, and held a note of anxiety regarding the fate of that new world which the genius of Lenin had helped to create.

In 1926, in the night of May 17th to 18th, Lucien Herr died. He had for many months suffered agonies; he had known that there was no hope of escape from the cancer that gnawed him.

Yet with a magnificent stoicism he had kept up a pretence of neither knowing nor caring. The memory of Lucien Herr was trebly dear to Blum. He was the man who had been his first Socialist teacher, the man who had made him acquainted with Jaurès, the man through whom he had first met Porto Riche, closest and most intimate of his friends. Blum knew that, fond though Lucien Herr had been of him, he had been fonder still of Jaurès and Porto Riche—but that consciousness never made the slightest difference to his feelings towards Herr.

Death was indeed thinning the ranks of Blum's intimate circle. It was hovering ever nearer to his own household. Lise Blum became weaker and weaker while leading members of the medical profession disagreed about the nature of her ailment. More and more, every moment Blum could spare from his legal work and political activities was devoted to his sick wife.

And Blum was necessarily absent or busy many hours of the day. Though not in the Chamber, he was still a leading figure in the party. He was in great request as an orator. He had committee meetings galore to attend. He had an ever increasing number of briefs to study, an ever increasing number of intricate causes to plead in court. And he had his daily leading article to write for *Le Populaire*, an article which no man interested in French politics could afford to miss for a single day. Yet he found time for all manner of activities

and kindly acts as well. The following is typical: he had heard of a youngster, a member of the Socialist Youth organisation whom various troubles had brought almost to the brink of suicide. Blum sent for him, closeted himself with him and spent two hours consoling him, reasoning with him. When the youth left Blum, he carried his head on high and had regained hope and self-confidence.

Any number of similar incidents might be cited. Nothing that could help a fellow creature or advance the cause of Socialism left him indifferent. It was difficult to find time for it all, but at worst the necessary time was taken from the hours that should have been devoted to sleeping.

Blum had been without a seat in the Chamber for about a year when he received the visit of M. Montel, the Secretary of the Socialist Federation of the Aude department. There was a vacancy in Narbonne, and M. Montel was the obvious Socialist candidate; he had spent years labouring in the local politics and looked forward to receiving the reward in the shape of a seat in the Chamber. Very simply he offered to stand down in Blum's favour. At first Blum refused, but the argument that his leadership in the house was essential to the party vanquished his sentimental objections. He agreed to stand. His decision made the Narbonne by-election a matter of national importance. The Communists hoped to repeat their Paris victory. The Right groups, not particularly hopeful for themselves, had visions of getting one of

the other Left candidates to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them. The Radicals claimed Narbonne as a fief of their own. Again a ferocious election campaign ensued, in which no means, whether slander, physical force or corruption, was left untried to secure Blum's defeat. He threw himself with heart and soul into the fight, manfully aided by his friends, particularly by Bracke. It was no easy task, for Southern Frenchmen are clannish, and many looked upon Léon Blum as an outsider. Narbonne is the centre of a big wine district; Blum's opponents spread the story that he was a teetotaller. But the sight of Blum drinking wine *coram publico* soon disposed of that stupid lie.

He triumphed over all his opponents. The Narbonne Socialists went mad with joy when the figures were published, and Montel clapped Blum on the back: "You are deputy for Narbonne till your dying day!"

In the Chamber, when his spare figure showed itself in the doorway, the Socialist deputies rose and gave him an ovation. Before his electoral defeat he had been secretary of the parliamentary group, though virtually he had acted as leader. The group now elected him into the chair. He was leader in name as well as in fact.

It was a year later that a new and cruel gap occurred in the inner ring around him; Porto Riche died. He had been gravely ill for some time, and Blum had thus to share all his spare moments between two sick persons—his affection-

ate wife and the dearest of his friends. Porto Riche was twenty-three years older than Blum, but he had so lively a mind, so juvenile a temperament that it had never occurred to Blum that this friend might be taken before him. With him France lost one of her two greatest playwrights of modern times; Paris intellectual circles lost a man whose charm of manner and attractive wit no man had ever been able to resist. In Jaurès Blum had lost the friend of his mind; in Porto Riche he lost the friend of his heart.

CHAPTER XV

CHANGES, PERSONAL AND POLITICAL

LEON BLUM FOUND the Chamber in the main unchanged. A trifle more to the Left perhaps, in conformity with the public opinion; but the Right was in office, tolerated by the Chamber. During this period one had the feeling that the Chamber altogether did not amount to much. In political significance, in influence on public events it was far less important than certain powers outside the machinery of government, as for example the great banks, the insurance companies, the coal, iron and steel, paper and mills trusts, the electricity monopoly, the big furnishers of the army and navy. The electors moved steadily leftwards. The fact that eighty per cent of French schoolteachers are Socialists or Communists powerfully influenced the youth of the country; every four years, at the general elections, four classes of new electors brought overwhelming support to the Left parties. The Right groups took this into account by adopting Left names. Staunch Royalists and Ultramontanes called themselves Republicans; die-hard Conservatives sought popular support as Left Republicans, and so on right down the scale. Though their numbers were condemned to a

steady decrease in the Chamber, they sat strongly entrenched in the Senate that became more and more the sure bastion of vested interests. The Right had another fortress: the Press. With few and unimportant exceptions the Press existed for the sole purpose of defending political reaction and capitalist interests. One of its favourite pastimes was to belittle and ridicule the Chamber. And, truth to tell, the Chamber did but little to assert itself. Every time the electors were consulted they expressed a desire to see the Left in power, and yet from 1919 to 1924 the National Block, from 1926 to 1932 the National Union, supplied the cabinets and ruled the country. From time to time the Radicals made an attempt to interrupt the sequence of Right administrations. Thus in 1930 M. Daladier was sent for to the Elysée. He strongly urged the Socialists to join him in the cabinet.

The offer was felt to be so serious that a party congress was convened to examine the question. The reply was not the unconditional negative that had been the rule up till then. It was hinted that the Socialists might participate if Daladier were to table a programme satisfactory to them. M. Daladier, the very type of the professional Radical politician, did not believe in a programme. His programme consisted in being in office and remaining there as long as possible. To this end a rigid programme which he would be expected at least to try to put into practice, would be a hindrance.

Blum warned the congress against acceptance under such conditions. He found himself supported not only by Paul Faure, Amédée Dunois and Bracke, but also by the *Bataille Socialiste* group which under Zyromski's leadership formed the Left Wing of the party. Renaudel, as before, led the Participationists who included almost all the men who some time later were to secede and form the short lived Neo-Socialist party. "Outside the Government we can support it and drive it in the direction we want. Inside it and without the guarantee of an agreed programme we would be helpless prisoners": such was the argument Blum successfully advanced. There were impatient mutterings, however: "At this rate we will never become Ministers"; but this cut little ice save with a few who believed themselves to be in the running for ministerial posts and were prepared to put their own preferment before the interests of their party and of Labour.

The presence of these men in the party, often in prominent places, was a permanent source of weakness, yet so penetrated was Blum with the necessity for unity that, up to the last, he not only made no move to get rid of them, but exerted all his diplomatic skill in an effort to smooth the differences over. This did not prevent him from feeling anxious about developments in the party. There was every ground for political anxiety outside the party. The great Wall Street crash heralded a world-wide slump of which France

was to be one of the last countries to suffer, but which was gravely to add to the difficulties of international economic and political affairs. The rotting fabric of the capitalistic system was beginning to crumble away at such a rate that vested interests looked round for new weapons of defence. Italy had shown the way. Fascism was chosen as the last hope of a dying system. The Fascist tide began to rise in many countries at an alarming rate. The beginnings of a Fascist offensive began to make themselves felt in France. The Chamber was pusillanimous; the Senate though by no means Fascist was devoted to defence of the existing system. There seemed on the Radical side to be no leader clear-sighted enough to realise the danger, or resolute enough to meet it. And the masses tended for the time being more and more to apathy or to loss of confidence in the efficiency of parliamentary institutions.

There was therefore every cause for misgivings for a man like Léon Blum whose Marxist training had taught him to gauge the signs of the time and whose quick intelligence made him sense coming developments earlier than the average man.

But these were not his only troubles. The health of Lise Blum was becoming steadily worse. In a way she clung to life, and yet she felt that she was doomed. She was profoundly attached to her husband and to her son and dreaded leaving them alone. She loved her daughter-in-law and appreciated the loving care with which she surrounded

her, but she had the feeling that all that care was in vain. And when she looked at her little granddaughter, tears sprang to her eyes as she realised that she would not see the child grow up. To her husband she never complained; never hinted to him that she saw clearly through the reassuring phrases of the doctors. And he on his side never let show his anxiety in her presence, unless it was that the very constancy of his care and affection let her guess that he, too, knew what was shortly to be. When he spoke softly to her and reassuringly made plans for the future, appeared as if nothing were amiss, she would smile at him and pretend to believe him. And waves of happiness would come over her, not that she had any hope herself, but because she could measure his affection by the trouble he gave himself to persuade her to hope.

The 1931 summer vacation brought her a passing spell of improvement. She seized upon it to try to persuade her loved ones that she was on the road to recovery. She started again taking an interest in her dress, and putting on rouge on her lips and cheeks. It was a pathetic flash. In the autumn she spent a short time with friends in the country. When she came back to Paris the flash was over. The grey mark of approaching death lay on her wasted cheeks. She died early in December, 1931.

Thus ended for Léon Blum a long chapter of his life. The love Lise Blum bore her husband had been absorbing, exclusive. But he had

LEON BLUM RETURNING HOME AFTER HE WAS BEATEN UP

always been too much a spoiled child of Society for their union to have been entirely without passing clouds. But their youthful, intimate friendship had with the years grown into a tenderness that linked them irrevocably to one another. She probably would have preferred him to have embraced another career than that of politics, but she nevertheless, once he had embraced it, accepted that life and shared with him all its joys and sorrows. She had helped him in a practical way, too. Just as, in earlier years, she had assisted and sometimes replaced him as theatre critic, so in later years she had constituted herself the efficient chief clerk in his office.

For the last time, the apartment in the Boulevard Montparnasse was filled with friends and with flowers. Not a single eye was dry among those who, for the first time, saw those friendly rooms empty of a presence that had filled them with charm. She had expressed the wish to be cremated and her ashes, stored in a coffin as tiny as a baby's, were interred in the Cemetery of Montparnasse.

Meanwhile political events left Blum little time for private concerns. The 1932 general election was impending. Regarding his own seat in Narbonne there was no need for anxiety. In 1932 and in 1936, Blum's success was assured and he could afford to neglect to some extent the campaign in his own constituency in order to fly elsewhere to the help of Socialist candidates who faced greater odds.

Blum, for all his optimism, has always been a realist. He did not expect 1932 to produce an overwhelming Left victory at the polls; he merely hoped that the new Chamber would show a further slight move to the Left. The 1928 Chamber, it will be recalled, already had a Left majority, but not a very sound or cohesive one. The result of the 1932 election justified Blum's moderate expectations; on paper the Left groups commanded a majority sufficient to justify the hope that for the next four years the Radicals would be in office.

M. Lebrun had just entered the Elysée after the murder of M. Doumer by a White Russian madman. He called upon Edouard Herriot, leader of the Radical party, to form the Government.

A Socialist party congress was called together in Paris. Blum submitted a programme of six points destined to facilitate Socialist support of the new cabinet. To this end the six points had been selected from the platform of the Radical party. He knew it would have been useless to have asked Herriot to endorse a Socialist platform. It was a question of making it possible for Socialists and Radicals to march alongside of each other for part of the way. But Herriot turned down this platform despite the fact that it was a Radical one. He found a variety of reasons for this apparently illogical decision. "I see you include the forty-hours week," he said. "I am aware that this has been endorsed by my party. But it is out

of the question to put through a forty-hours week law in France alone. We must wait for an international agreement on the subject."

The truth was that, like M. Daladier in 1930, Herriot thought it more important to have a Radical Government in office than to force a Radical programme through Parliament, and he was not particularly anxious for Socialist collaboration. He had, in his own fief of Lyons, had trouble with the Socialists. He liked Blum very much personally, but he was a little afraid of Blum's politics.

Blum, who had reposed little confidence in Daladier, was much readier to trust Herriot. At least to this extent, that he felt Herriot was perfectly sincere in his dislike of the "*mur d'argent*" and had neither forgotten nor forgiven his defeat in 1926. Moreover he was drawn to Herriot's honest and cultured personality.

For these reasons, although Herriot had turned down the Socialist offer, Blum led his party in loyal support of the Radical Premier, until the latter suddenly proposed the recognition and payment of the American war debt. Whatever the legal rights and wrongs of this much debated question, there can be no doubt that French public opinion was absolutely opposed to paying America one single Franc. The man-in-the-street in France reasoned thus: American armament firms made tons of money out of Allied orders before the United States came into the war.

America declared war on Germany to defend her own interests and not out of disinterested love for the Allies. Her help was welcome and useful, but it came when France and England had borne the brunt of the German onslaught. Her losses were infinitesimal compared with those of the French or the British. Any sums America lent towards the winning of the war must be regarded as America's share in the common effort. These debts have been more than paid by hundreds of thousands of French, British and other Allied dead, without whose sacrifice America could not have defeated Germany.

Herriot put the matter on a higher ethical level than the man-in-the-street. With splendid courage he defended his point of view in the Chamber, though he knew that his own party followed him out of personal loyalty and not out of conviction. The Communists violently opposed the proposal. Blum, who already foresaw that within a short time the political unity of the proletariat would become imperatively necessary, wished to avoid everything that might widen the chasm separating the two proletarian parties. The Socialists voted against Herriot. The cabinet fell.

Though defeated, Herriot came out of the affair with increased personal prestige—a fact that was not altogether to the liking of his successor Daladier. So Daladier asked him to consent to go to America as a sort of envoy extraordinary,

and uttered vague and perfectly dishonest phrases about France's possible debt-repaying intentions in the distant future. But at the same time he did his best to embarrass Herriot in the accomplishment of his mission in Washington.

This piece of tactics was characteristic of the conception of government held or at least practised by M. Daladier and his Radical friends. It was not calculated to inspire Léon Blum with confidence in the possibility of a loyal and frank collaboration of his party with the Daladier cabinet. But there were other leading Socialists who held different views. Renaudel had for years, with absolute sincerity, held that the Socialists were mistaken in holding aloof. Marquet, the ambitious Mayor of Bordeaux, and Déat who thought that a man who had distinguished himself at the *Ecole Normale* was wasted if he remained in the rank and file, were impatient to taste of the sweets of office. Beaten on this issue on repeated occasions, they were now determined to force the issue.

Blum at first believed the usual methods would suffice. There would be a debate; the majority would reject participation and the minority would accept the decision. But when he heard Marquet's speech at the 1933 congress, he exclaimed: "You horrify me!" and he realised that nothing less than the unity of the party was in danger. He tried hard to avert the threatening secession. He showed himself highly conciliatory; but he

would not budge on the principle itself. France was rapidly nearing a crisis; the Socialist party must, with that crisis in view, keep its independence.

Renaudel, Déat, Marquet left the Socialist party and founded the "Néo-Socialist" group. They mustered thirty deputies and a few senators. In point of fact the seceders met with no success. Renaudel had occasion later on bitterly to regret a step that cut him off from his old friends and his accustomed circle. The Neo-Socialists, after a vain struggle to keep above water, were within a relatively short time to merge with other minor groups on the fringe of the Labour movement, and form a small hybrid party called the *Union Socialiste Républicaine.*

The scission, however, affected Blum deeply. He took it very much to heart. Not so the Radicals, who were doubly delighted, first to see a split in the ranks of their Socialist rivals and secondly to witness the formation to their Left of one of these floating little groups with which French Radical tacticians love to play. Petty tactics of this kind distracted the attention of Radical premiers like Daladier and Chautemps from the grave issues that were in preparation. In France itself the reactionary forces were preparing for a trial of strength that would shake the Republic to its foundations. In Germany the adventurer, Hitler, had slunk into power through the back-door of the Wilhelmstrasse that had been opened for him

by Herr von Papen, and after stamping out opposition at home, was preparing to assert a claim to European hegemony.

The reproach has been frequently levelled at Léon Blum that he did not take Hitler seriously and that, a few weeks before the National Socialist triumph, he reasserted his confidence in the solidity of the German Republic. The facts are correct. Blum was mistaken. But he was not the only one who made the same mistake. Men who were in a much better position to be informed regarding events in Germany than was the French Socialist leader took exactly the same view. Half an hour before misguided old Marshal von Hindenburg, yielding to the pressure of his son and of Herr von Papen who wanted to prevent the exposure of the *Osthilfe* scandal, called Hitler to the presidential palace, the ambassador of a great Power in Berlin sent a reassuring message to his Government: every solution of the crisis was possible, he said, save a Hitler. One of the present writers was textually told, in March, 1932, by the late Chancellor General Kurt von Schleicher: "Up to the minute when the President refused me leave to dissolve the Reichstag, I would have been prepared to stake everything I possessed on the impossibility of Hitler ever gaining power. He was on the decline. At the autumn elections he had lost heavily. At the spring elections, had I been allowed to hold them, he would have been crushed. It was a beaten man

whom the treachery of a few men around Hindenburg admitted to the Wilhelmstrasse."

Before passing to the relation of the tragic events on the French, and on the international, stage that were to precede and render impossible the advent of the Popular Front to power in France, an event of importance in Blum's personal history must be mentioned.

We have seen how the death of Lise Blum left him desolate, and how little apt he is to lead a lonely life. Many of his friends therefore were but little surprised when, in 1932, he married again. Thérèse had for many years been a close friend of his and of the first Madame Blum. She was, in addition, that which Lise Blum had never pretended to be, a very active member of the Socialist party.

The Montparnasse home had been abandoned. A new apartment was taken on the Quai Bourbon. It was smaller than the Montparnasse home, and boasted of no such majestic library. But it had a quiet charm of its own, and as you walk out of the broad, cool archway, you see a placid arm of the Seine flowing by, rimmed with green foliage.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FASCIST COUP AND THE BIRTH OF THE POPULAR FRONT

DURING THE SUMMER and autumn of 1933 the Right opposition showed intense activity. The Press conducted a campaign of great virulence against the members of the Radical cabinet; an easy matter in France where a public man may with impunity be called a liar, a thief, a murderer in the public Press. The Leagues, the Royalist *Camelots du Roi*, M. Taittinger's *Jeunesses Patriotes* and the *Solidarité Française* of that millionaire perfumer Coty, who thought because he was a Corsican he had the calibre of a Napoleon, vied with each other. The *Croix de Feu* movement of Colonel Casimir de la Rocque, fitting descendant of an ancestor who fled to Coblenz and fought with the Prussian armies against his native country, began to grow with alarming rapidity, using patriotic arguments to gild the Fascist pill which, they well knew, tasted bitter to the French palate. Parliament was attacked, it was ridiculed; it was held up to execration as Public Enemy No. One.

The apparent solidity of the Fascist régime in Italy, the triumph of National Socialism in

Germany, the iron rule of dictatorships in Poland, in various Balkan States, the birth of Austro-Fascism encouraged the hopes of those who, in France, believed Fascism to be the last hope of decrepit private capitalism. The Leagues differed in their aims and programmes; they were united by their common hatred of Democracy, of Radical cabinets, of Republican institutions.

The Radical Government, heedless of the signs of the time, went on pottering with parish-pump questions. It was wrapped in comfortable security; it refused to take the Leagues seriously; it fondly believed that Hitlerism would soon collapse out of sheer incapacity.

It was in a France thus laden with electricity that there suddenly burst the Stavisky bomb. Alexandre Stavisky was a financial adventurer of Russo-Polish origin, who, with the aid of a few influential lawyer-politicians and certain high police officials, exploited the credulity of the investing public. The money thus acquired was used mostly in increasing the radius of influence of the Stavisky group. Several weeklies and at least one Paris daily were subsidised or bought outright. Plaintiffs found that their claims were lost in a maze of juridical red tape carefully devised by those police officials and magistrates who belonged to the Stavisky gang.

In reality the scandal never attained anything like the proportions of the Panama Scandal in France or the Teapot Dome affair in the United

States. But it happened, or was discovered, under a Radical Government; some of Stavisky's helpers, in some cases at least perfectly ingenuous ones, were Radicals. To the opposition looking for a stick to beat the Government with, this was a veritable boon. Stavisky, who had fled to Chamonix, near the Swiss frontier, was found dead. The authorities said it was a case of suicide. The public believed it was a case of murder; murder in order to prevent inconvenient disclosures.

M. Chautemps, who was Prime Minister at the time, does not appear to have grasped the significance of the affair. He treated it as an ordinary criminal case; he did not perceive the intention to use crime as screen for a political coup. M. Chiappe, a somewhat bombastic Corsican who was Chief of Police in Paris and who, thanks to his and his wife's financial support of the Paris social and charitable police funds, had become the idol of the Paris police, believed the affair—to which by virtue of his position he was no stranger—to be susceptible of raising him from police greatness to political eminence. He smoothed over any qualms M. Chautemps might have felt, and at the same time he allowed the Leagues, particularly the *Camelots du Roi* to turn Paris streets into a nightly rioting ground. Riots indeed became a normal state of things under the benevolent eye of this strange Chief of Police. Fanatic youths shouting "Long live the King!" smashed the iron gratings surrounding the Paris Boulevard

trees and used them as missiles against inoffensive passers by, while M. Chiappe's police looked on, or beat up journalists suspected of taking notes.

Léon Blum in *Le Populaire*, and the Communist leaders in *L'Humanité*, vainly demanded a strong hand against the rioters and their friend the Chief of Police.

The matter was raised in the Chamber. M. Chautemps used honeyed words: justice, he said, must be given a free hand, but, nevertheless, an Enquiry Commission was not called for. This tepid attitude satisfied neither the Right opposition nor the Extreme Left who vainly warned the Government of the gravity of the situation. M. Chautemps, after falling between all the stools available, had to resign. He was succeeded by another Radical, M. Daladier.

M. Daladier was believed to be both a strong man and a clever one. His reputation had been built up on a gift for silence. A weak and unintelligent man may well pass for strong and clever as long as he does not open his mouth. His reputation, however, stood him in good stead for a short while; the situation seemed to improve a little. It might have gone on improving if M. Daladier had chosen either to go on doing and saying nothing, or to strike with decisive energy in the right spot. He chose a third course. He closeted himself in his room, drafted five decrees after much cogitation, sent for his Minister

of the Interior, M. Frot, showed him the five decrees and said: "That is what I have decided to do!"

M. Frot read the decrees and stood aghast. M. Chiappe, who should either have been sternly reminded of his duties or else have been summarily dismissed, was to be made Governor General of Morocco. Four other important officials were to be displaced—among them the administrator of the *Comédie Française* who was to be replaced by a police official of whom no one had ever guessed that he had theatrical leanings. What the *Comédie Française* may have had to do either with Stavisky or with the Fascist Leagues has to this day remained the secret of the gods and possibly of M. Daladier.

M. Frot, after vainly trying to shake his chief's strange resolve, asked him: "Have you informed these men of their new functions?" M. Daladier looked up blandly: "No—but I will tell them now by telephone."

From M. Chiappe, he got at the telephone there and then the much discussed reply that he refused the vice-regal honours offered him and that he would "be in the street" the next day. Being in the street in French may either mean, in popular parlance, to be "fired", or to start a riot or a revolution.

M. Chiappe may have meant it according to the first reading; the public interpreted it according to the second reading. He was extolled in the Right

Press as the saviour of France, a sort of General Boulanger without a uniform.

On February 6th, 1934, M. Daladier was to read to the Chamber the declaration of policy of his Government. For the same day the ex-Service-men's associations had announced that they would march past the Chamber in an impressive demonstration against financial and political corruption. M. Daladier in a puerile attempt to win over part of the opposition had given two portfolios to Right-Centre politicians who, on hearing of his decision regarding M. Chiappe, hastened to withdraw. To meet trouble on the street, M. Daladier had to rely on a very honest and capable new Chief of Police, M. Bonnefoy Sibour, who, however, coming from another department, knew nothing about Paris police and was at every step met with passive resistance and active intrigues by some of his principal subordinates who were friends of M. Chiappe.

Civil war was hammering at the gates of the Republic. For the peaceful march past of the ex-Service-men was a device of the Fascist conspirators. Under cover of these estimable and perfectly sincere men, the Leagues intended to storm the Palais Bourbon, overturn not only the Government but the Republic and install an authoritarian régime after the Italian or German pattern. The chief wire-pullers were, besides the leaders of the Leagues, the reactionary town councillors

of Paris; one of the concentration points of the Leagues was to be the square in front of the Paris Town Hall.

Léon Blum tried in vain to impress the Government with the earnestness of the situation. True, the Minister of the Interior forbade all gatherings next to the Chamber; but he allowed the assembly of the war veterans on the Place de la Concorde that is only separated from the Chamber by a bridge over the Seine. To occupy militarily the Place de la Concorde seemed the obvious precaution to take. To draft four or five reliable regiments into Paris seemed a reasonable measure. The Daladier cabinet, relying on its parliamentary majority, rejected all advice.

The leaders of the Paris proletariat were faced with far-reaching decisions. It was clear to everyone save to Ministers in office that on the evening of the sixth of February the Fascists would attempt a coup. What should be the attitude of the Paris working-class masses? Should they march down and oppose the execution of the Fascist plan? Should they stand aside and await events?

The Communist leaders adopted a curious course. They told their men to go to the Town Hall Square and to the Place de la Concorde, to yell against the feeble and futile Radical Government and at the same time against the Fascist would-be Revolutionaries.

Blum took another course, inspired as usual by his desire to avoid violent conflict. If the Paris

working masses were to be mobilised they would probably crush the Fascists, but that would be the beginning of a civil war. After all, to keep order was the business of the Government; it must be given the chance to do its job. But, should it fail to do so, the masses must be ready to act. The Socialist forces were therefore put in a state of alarm: but they were confined to their own districts in the city and told to keep clear of the prospective battlefields.

The course of events demonstrated the accuracy of this estimate. True, the Communists succeeded in foiling the Leagues' concentration on the Town Hall Square, but on the Place de la Concorde they were swamped by their Fascist opponents.

While the reactionary mob was gathering and the war veterans were mustering next to the Grand Palais, and poor M. Bonnefoy Sibour was marshalling with anxious eyes the thin cordon of police and Mobile Guards drawn in front of the bridge leading to the Chamber, M. Daladier, still relying on his paper majority, was preparing to read his declaration of policy to a feverish Chamber.

The Right deputies were buoyant. They, or at least many of them, knew that the plans anticipated that between 7 and 8 p.m. a frantic, tricolour-wagging mob would overpower the Chamber guard and tumultuously invade parliamentary precincts. Anxious whispering took place on the Government bench. The Radical deputies were,

to say the least, jumpy. Some of them to reach the Chamber, had had to run the gauntlet of a hostile crowd: all of them had been impressed by the defensive measures taken to protect the Palais Bourbon. One could not hear the roar of the mob across the Seine, but one could sense it. The opposition was seething with victorious expectancy; the ministerial benches were shaking with apprehension. Blum set them an example of cool courage. He mounted the tribune steps with no more signs of excitement than if it had been a question of voting a credit for the erection of a bridge over some provincial river. With a firm voice he read out the agreed text of a declaration by the Socialist party: support of democracy, resolve to stamp out corruption, condemnation of all reactionary attempts to overthrow the Republic. But his audience was restive. Men rushed in and out, bringing or seeking news. Nervously, the deputies kept their eyes on the doorways: when would the mob break in?

News began to filter through. It was mostly false news—of broken police cordons, of volleys fired, of scores of dead, of burning ministries, of an irresistible assault of the mob on the Elysée. Vainly did Blum and his friends try to preach scepticism and coolness. The sitting was suspended by the President. Many took it that the intention was to allow the deputies to clear out while the going was good. The members of the cabinet sat or stood around as helpless as the rest. With

a shrug of his shoulders Blum noted the impotency of this so-called Government.

Meantime things were happening on the Place de la Concorde. Motor buses were set on fire and lit the darkened square with a lurid glare. A group of fanatics tried to set fire to the Ministry of Marine at the corner of the rue Royale. The police, led by officers whose hearts were with M. Chiappe, reacted hardly at all. But shrieking fire brigade cars rushed down the street packed with tumultuous demonstrators, and squadrons of mounted Garde Republicaine swept down, brandishing their flashing swords. The *Camelots du Roi* threw handsful of marbles in their path so that the horses stumbled and fell. Others with walking sticks, at the end of which safety razor blades had been fixed, slashed at the bellies of the horses.

A rush was made for the bridge. "Down with the thieves! Death to the Ministers! Away with the robbers! The Republic!" The thin line guarding the bridge stood firm. A high-pitched voice shouted "Fire!" The rifles barked. Men fell. There were gaps in the disorderly storming mob. Panic broke out here and there.

Then, very slowly, as if marching in a funeral procession, thirty abreast, arm linked in arm, the serried columns of the war-veterans debouched from the Champs Elysées and marched steadily over the Place de la Concorde. They had been promised their march past; they had it. Impassive, with calm, slow step, as if they had not heard

the rattle of musketry, the cries of the wounded, the raging yells of the maddened crowd, they marched in the glare of the burning motor buses. Not towards the Chamber—for they had no intention of storming Parliament or upsetting the Republic. But just across the Place de la Concorde and over to the Boulevards. The police and Mobile Guards stood to attention as they passed, and only the maddest of the fanatical reactionary mob tried to divert them from their self-appointed, orderly route.

When they had passed by, the Leagues returned to the attack on the bridge. But wave after wave broke against the iron line of Guards. The Government was master of the situation.

Or at least it would have been, had it been united. The cabinet was in feverish session. The Minister of the Interior, M. Frot, advised firmness; a Government must govern, he said; its main business was to maintain order, and he was prepared to guarantee order. Daladier felt inclined to take the same view. Others shrank from the responsibility of bloodshed. Men outside the cabinet were called upon for advice. Blum counselled firmness. Democracy, the Republic, popular liberties were at stake. Frossard, once the fiery Communist revolutionary, now edging towards the Right, painted in lurid colours to his friend Daladier the horrors of civil war. He believed that it was better to leave the responsibility to others. Old man Jeanneney, president of the

cautious, conservatively-minded Senate, supported him; he suggested a Ministry of National Concentration under M. Doumergue, former President of the Republic.

Blum was adamant. No government worthy of the name dare yield to a mob; a reactionary mob. Let the cabinet assume its responsibilities, proclaim a state of siege, if need be arrest the ringleaders of the revolt.

The chief law officer of the Republic, M. Donat Guigne, *Procureur General*, embarked on juridical arguments; there was no legal possibility of prosecuting the ringleaders.

The Elysée put in its word. M. Lebrun, President of the Republic, hinted that he expected the cabinet to resign.

At one p.m. on February 7th, as, under the eye of the pro-Chiappe police, new gangs of Fascist demonstrators were forming on the boulevards, M. Daladier intimated the resignation of the cabinet "in order to avoid bloodshed."

Insurrection had triumphed over parliamentary institutions.

M. Doumergue, amid a magnificent chorus of praise from the Right Press, was sent for to form a cabinet. Rapturous phrases were penned about this Republican Elder Statesman leaving his ploughshare in Tournefeuille to steer the ship of State. It was not a mythical ploughshare he had left, but—temporarily—the highly lucrative Board of Directors of the Suez Canal Company.

He arrived in Paris amid a triumphant pæan from the Right. The way seemed clear for Fascist reaction. But those who thought thus had not reckoned with the people of France. From the mining and industrial North to crowded passionate Marseilles the working classes were astir, preparing if need be to march on Paris and clean it of the anti-Republican scourge. Peasants all over France, nurtured in the spirit of the Revolution, dug out their ancient rifles or shotguns and prepared to defend their liberties, should Paris fail.

But Paris did not fail.

On February 7th, there was more rioting. It was an aftermath in which the darkest hooligan elements of the great city eagerly took part. But that was not Paris.

The Communist party summoned the working class of Paris to assemble on the Place de la République on February 9th. Thousands upon thousands of Socialist and non-party workmen joined their Communist brothers. The great square was packed with police and Guards. Savage but desultory fighting took place all night in that whole section of Paris. There were more dead, proletarian dead. The people of Paris, the sons of a dozen revolutions, were up and doing.

The Socialist and Communist parties, the C.G.T. and its rival, the C.G.T.U., issued a joint manifesto. The Republic was in danger. Popular liberties were imperilled. Only one answer was possible: a general strike. It was proclaimed for the 12th of February.

The leaders of the Fascist conspiracy expected the strike to be a relative failure. It was a triumphant success. In Paris and all over France. Not only did the workmen strike, save on the public transport services where they were told by their leaders to carry on, but the bulk of the small shopkeepers joined in the strike.

On February 12th, in the early afternoon, on the historic Place de la Nation in Paris, the Popular Front was born. It was born of the spontaneous impulse of the masses and the wise realism of the leaders of the proletarian organisations.

Endless grey columns of working people had gathered along the wide Cours de Vincennes. At a given signal they were to march into the Place de la Nation—Socialists on one side Communists on the other, to hear their respective leaders proclaim the iron will of the masses to preserve their liberties.

They marched. But from these serried ranks there rose but one mighty cry: "Unity of Action! No separation! Unity of action!"

Léon Blum spoke from the same improvised platform as his old opponent of the Congress of Tours, Marcel Cachin. He spoke in the same accents. He was greeted with cheers by men who had followed him all these years as well as by men who had spent these years in vilifying him. The Socialist and Communist flags dipped together in salute. Hundreds of thousands of clenched fists rose in the air.

The people of Paris, the people of France had given their answer to the Fascist challenge. On that same day when in distant Vienna the heroic workmen of Austria embarked on a hopeless struggle—hopeless because they had been disunited—the workmen of Paris, by proclaiming and proving their unity, fought and won their battle of the Marne.

Léon Blum, whose dominant thought had ever been the unity of the proletarian forces, must have thrilled with joy and pride on the Place de la Nation. His dream was beginning to come true.

This demonstration of unity was no mere flash in the pan. Negotiations were started between the Socialist and Communist parties and between the two rival sections of the Trade Union movement. Co-ordinating committees were appointed. It was not always smooth work; there were traditions of bitter hostility, of personal hatreds, of doctrinal differences to overcome. Among the secondary leaders on both sides there were some of petty spirit and narrow outlook. But the pressure of the masses was irresistible. And Blum, faithful to the conciliatory tradition of Jaurès, worked with might and main and, what was even more important, with skill and tact, to overcome all difficulties and prepare the way for common action along the whole front.

Common action was more than ever necessary. Using the specious argument of "national union" with which Radical leaders had often been caught,

Doumergue had succeeded in muzzling the Radicals by roping into his ministry some of their leaders including Edouard Herriot. Their rôle proved to be a sorry one, for, having encountered defeat in the open field, the reactionaries set to work to try and achieve their ends by legal means. The policy of the Doumergue Government was a reactionary one. Thanks to the naïve candour of Radical leaders, who were not damped in their loyalty to Doumergue even by an unprecedented campaign of calumny against some of their colleagues like Chautemps and Bonnet, the Chamber was passively obedient.

But the force of Left unity of action was making itself felt.

Already it was clear that the unity inside the Labour movement must be broadened in its basis. It must include the peasants and smaller middle classes who belonged to the Radical party. Out of the "Common Front" of Socialism there must grow the "Popular Front" of Democracy.

Léon Blum was one of the first to sense this, one of the most active and persistent in working to bring it to pass. He had very clearly summed up the lessons of the February fights.

"The Fascist insurrection was able to attain its ends and impose its will to a considerable degree. It was not able to burn down the Palais Bourbon nor to throw the deputies of the Extreme Left into the Seine; it was not able to install its open leaders and more or less hidden inspirers in office.

But it was able to check the will of universal suffrage, to upset normal conditions of political life and to push into power men whose toleration of, and gratefulness for, favours received was to make them little by little slide into complicity.

"Why was it able to do this?

"Because the Government that was in office at that time yielded before it. And, if that Government yielded, it was because at bottom it represented nothing but individuals and did not feel itself to be the carrier, the interpreter, the instrument of the will of the people."

The analysis is clear and accurate. It inevitably leads to the conception of a Popular Front Government. It was necessary that the Republican institutions of France should receive new life from immediate contact with the masses. The suppression of the Commune, the Boulangist outbreak, the Dreyfus Affair and the Sixth of February, formed, in Blum's view, an unbroken line of reaction. It was a line that could be continued only if the masses were divided or apathetic. In the February days it had well nigh succeeded; it had been checked by the General Strike of the Twelfth of February. But it persisted in another form, a more insidious form. It would end by triumphing unless it were opposed by a solid wall of mass unity.

It would not be true to say that Blum invented the conception of the Popular Front. It was invented by no one; it sprang out of the political

instinct of a people that had 150 years of democratic tradition. But he was among the first to give voice and expression to that subconscious urge of the people, and to trace out the historic and political reasons that justified it and made it inevitable. If he was not the inventor of the Popular Front, he was one of its most potent artisans.

CHAPTER XVII

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS OF VICTORY

THE LEAGUES HAD been rudely and efficiently checked by the general strike, but, as Blum noted in his summary of the affair, they had achieved a measure of success. The Doumergue Government, extending from Tardieu on the Right to Herriot on the Left, was in office. M. Tardieu was writing a book on constitutional reform, preaching changes that would empty democratic government of all meaning; M. Doumergue, pitchforked into a greatness of which he had never thought himself capable, followed flounderingly in M. Tardieu's wake; M. Herriot was the prisoner of a hostile coalition he had been naïve enough to join on what he imagined would be equal terms.

The designs of the Right were well served by events. The Doumergue ministry was hardly in office when the dead body of a high legal dignitary, M. Prince, was found on the railway line near Dijon. Every professional detective concerned in the case, every unprejudiced but well-informed observer soon reached the conclusion that it was a case of suicide. They were all the more convinced when it appeared that this very M. Prince had

been concerned in the everlasting postponements of the various fraud cases against Stavisky. But M. Prince belonged to the Right. The cry went up that he had been assassinated by the Left. The accusations were made openly and with name. The Right newspapers denounced M. Chautemps as the probable murderer, as at least the instigator of the murder.

Never was a more scandalous, a more cruel, a more utterly unsupported charge brought against any public man. There was, however, no reasoning with the accusers. Recourse to justice was more than doubtful. A frenzy of hatred and passion had seized upon everyone connected with the Right political groups. M. Chéron, the Minister of Justice, an upright man who did his best to clear up the affair, fell a victim to the fury of the partisans of the immaculate memory of Prince.

Part of the opposition had its hands tied owing to Radical participation in the Ministry. The remainder, notably the Socialists under Blum's untiring leadership, kept up a plucky fight. The only bright spot in the Doumergue ministry was the department of Foreign Affairs which had been entrusted to M. Barthou. M. Barthou realised clearly the dangers of the European situation—the growing appetite and audacity of the Dictators. He consolidated France's relations with the Little Entente. He laid the basis of an entente with Russia. He strengthened the bonds of friendship with Britain and America. He was informed

of Italy's designs on Abyssinia and was considering means of diverting Mussolini from an adventure which he felt would prove dangerous for the League of Nations and for the good relations between the Powers.

Unfortunately the bullet of an assassin laid him low in Marseilles, together with King Alexander of Jugoslavia who was the guest of France. For diplomatic reasons, the full story of the plot was never disclosed: the evidence pointed so irresistibly to two European capitals that to have made use of it would have been to imperil world peace.

As Barthou's successor M. Doumergue appointed Pierre Laval, who was within a few months to destroy Barthou's work and reduce the prestige of France in Central Europe to the lowest ebb it had ever reached.

Barthou had, in his political opinions, always been at poles apart from Léon Blum, yet the two men had been friends.

They were linked together by a common high degree of culture and by the fact that they were both ardent lovers of books. The death of Barthou was not only a personal blow to Blum but, despite their divergent viewpoints, a political loss; for Barthou, with less apparent idealism than Briand, but perhaps more realism, pursued a foreign policy worthy of the best traditions of the Quai d'Orsay and was loyal to conceptions of peace and collective security that were also those of Léon Blum.

The Doumergue cabinet did not long survive its Minister of Foreign Affairs. M. Doumergue, on whom age and unexpected honours weighed heavily, took to the radio with the delight a child shows in handling a new toy. He addressed over the radio fatherly homilies to the citizens of France which the latter found boring at first and ridiculous soon thereafter. Ridicule still kills in France. When M. Doumergue chose to wear in public the Basque cap that M. Casimir de la Rocque had popularised among his Fascist "Troops" the cup overflowed. The Radical ministers began to have qualms. The Doumergue ministry foundered in a sea of ridicule. The "Saviour of France" was sent back to the Suez Canal Company's board-room.

Though Blum's incessant attacks in and out of Parliament no doubt contributed to sapping the motley foundations of M. Doumergue's Ministry, the immediate artisan of its fall was M. Flandin, whose gifts had apparently not appeared to M. Doumergue sufficient to include him in his Ministry of All the Talents.

Blum was, during this period, mainly concerned with strengthening and broadening the basis of the spontaneous "Front" that had been born on the Place de la Nation on the Twelfth of February, 1934. It was a task both complex and difficult. There were not only political but also personal obstacles to surmount.

On the Place de la Nation, the basis had been

laid for a close co-operation between the proletarian forces. But these forces by themselves sufficed neither to secure a majority nor to assure a stable government. On the other hand the previous experiences of a *Cartel* with the Radicals had not been encouraging. They had been at best superficial, tactical alliances without true substance. It became apparent that, if the "Front" of the Place de la Nation was to bear fruit, it must be extended. It must include the Radicals. Proletarian Unity of Action plus a revivified *Cartel* seemed to Blum to offer chances of success.

The conduct of the Right parties tended to favour the attempt to carry out this manœuvre. Despite the electors' verdict, the country seemed saddled with a succession of "National Front" administrations. The Right Press indulged in orgies of vilifications not only against Socialists but against many Radical leaders. The Leagues were still very much to the fore. In short, the Right, having snatched office, exercised its power with little decency and with no moderation at all. These were considerations that began to permeate the Radical masses in France. They were noted with extreme dissatisfaction by the electors who had voted a Left majority into the Chamber in 1932 and did not understand why that majority tolerated a Right Government. This fact could not but impress the Radical leaders, who began to consider favourably advances made by the Extreme Left.

To establish a solid political contact with some of these leaders was not altogether easy for Blum. With Herriot he was still, as ever, good friends; but Herriot a liberal of the old school had always been somewhat prejudiced against Socialism, and the keen rivalry between Socialists and Radicals in Lyon, of which city he was mayor, did not contribute to dispel this prejudice. Also, co-operation with Daladier presented difficulties for Blum. He had seen him at work on the 6th and particularly on the 7th of February; and that had not been calculated to reassure him. As we have noted, Blum's reasons for hesitation were of even older standing. Neither could he feel sure of being always at one with M. Chautemps. He appreciated Chautemps's skill; but so far it had been skill rather in preparing an event than in turning it to advantage.

Contact with the Communists was, strangely enough, much easier, though the relations between them and the Socialists had in the recent past been much more strained than those between Socialists and Radicals. The truth was that, without having abandoned any of their ultimate aims, the French Communists had learned political wisdom from the disasters that had overcome their comrades in Germany and elsewhere. They had devised an entirely new tactical method and they were imposing it on the Moscow Comintern. They had become sweet reasonableness itself; to Socialist eyes sometimes alarmingly so. They,

who a while back, had hissed the Marseillaise and refused respect to the Tricolour flag, suddenly remembered that both the Marseillaise and the Tricolour were of revolutionary origin and that there was no reason why these symbols of revolution should be left to the reactionaries. They annexed the Marseillaise and the Tricolour. They went further; they who had always been in the vanguard of the anti-militarist movement, declared that, at a time when the French Republic was threatened by aggressive Fascist powers, it was the duty of all liberty-loving Frenchmen to strengthen the Republic's army. For the cry: "Down with the Army!" they substituted: "Long live the Republican Army!" Doubtless their attitude in these matters was partly dictated by the belief that the main object of the Fascist powers was to assail the Soviet Union, and by the fact that relations between France and the Soviet Union had so far improved that in the event of war it was probable they would be allies. Moreover, the French Communist leaders, the veteran Cachin, but particularly the new men, Thorez and Duclos, had reached the conclusion that in a country of peasants and small middle class like France, the industrial proletariat would remain impotent unless it could win over a majority of these two sections of the population. The Communists were found not only ready but eager to draw ever closer their relations with the Socialist party.

The C.G.T., the moderate Trades Unions movement, constituted a different problem. Its leader and animator was Léon Jouhaux with whom Blum entertained close and friendly relations. He was essentially a diplomat, but he could be a fighter when occasion arose. The difficulty with the C.G.T. lay in the fact that it was bound by its constitution not to affiliate itself with any political party and that it had in point of fact always avoided interference in pure politics.

These manifold problems greatly absorbed Blum's thoughts and activities. Despite all obstacles they were gradually solved. Conferences between Blum on the one hand, Herriot, Daladier, Chautemps, Jouhaux, Duclos, Thorez and Cachin on the other, became more and more frequent and more and more harmonious.

These conferences took place sometimes in the Chamber, sometimes in Blum's quiet apartment on the Seine. The latter was both a place of work and a haven of rest. Léon and Thérèse Blum were now both in the sixties. They were old comrades who knew each other thoroughly and who could always depend on each other. She had for many years been devoted to him; he had always admired her lively intelligence and her impetuous ardour. To her he was not only a husband, but the leader of her party and she deemed it her province to care incessantly for his physical well-being. She hardly left his side. She acted as his chauffeur and as his private

secretary. Sharing his affection for his son, his daughter-in-law and his little grand-daughter, she managed to screen him from all household or family cares. It was fortunate indeed for Blum that during this period when constant thought and endless tact had to be devoted to building up the foundations of the Popular Front, he was thus shielded, cared for and assisted. Save for the legal work that was necessary to ensure the daily wherewithal and intercourse with a now voluntarily restricted circle of old friends, he was able to bend all his energies to the political task on hand.

This task was in a high degree facilitated by the mistakes of Léon Blum's opponents.

M. Flandin was rewarded for overthrowing Doumergue by succeeding him. M. Flandin is a very tall man; even his friends will hardly claim that he is a great man. He did not lack courage or at least boldness. He pushed boldness so far as to do that which no man had ever attempted: make from the tribune of the Chamber an insidious attack on Léon Blum's character. Even he was unable to find direct fault with Blum's honour: he attacked him through his son. He hinted that his father's influence had found a lucrative job for Robert Blum with a big industrial concern. In withering tones which, however, never departed from his habitual dignity, Blum scored off Flandin. The Chamber rang with cheers in tribute to Blum's defence of his and his son's honour.

This regrettable incident was not, of course, the cause of Blum's attacks on the Flandin Government: rather was it one of its unexpected consequences. He attacked it because he profoundly disliked its ultra-nationalist policy. And he found the more openings for attack since M. Flandin's skill was by no means on a par with his boldness.

M. Flandin's chief anxiety was to shine, but in the words Blum's favourite author Stendhal puts in the mouth of Count Mosca: "The question is not to shine, but to succeed." And M. Flandin did not succeed. His only merit, and it must not be underrated, is that for the eight months his ministry lasted, he saved France from the disadvantage of having M. Laval at the Quai d'Orsay.

Flandin ended by collapsing from sheer inefficiency. After a few days' interval occupied by a colourless Buisson cabinet, he was succeeded by Pierre Laval. For Laval's personality Blum had a disdainful contempt. Not because from the humblest beginnings he had risen to the highest station, but for the manner in which that progress had been accomplished.

For Laval's policy, Blum reserved his bitterest opposition. For he saw that his foreign policy abased France, betrayed the League of Nations, delivered up Abyssinia to Mussolinian savagery, and dangerously estranged France and England. He saw that his financial policy led to a deflation that drained France instead of saving her, and that put an intolerable load on the shoulders of the

poor. But it was his constitutional policy that he chiefly attacked; for Laval's first care was to strike a terrible blow at parliamentary institutions by legislating by means of arbitrary decrees instead of by Acts of Parliament.

Yet these very faults, grave as they were for France, powerfully contributed towards the foundation of a real Popular Front on a broad basis.

The National Fête on July 14th, 1935, brought tangible evidence of the success of the efforts made by all concerned. For hours the masses streamed past the column that marks the place where once stood the Bastille. They included Republicans, Radicals, Neo-Socialists, Socialists and Communists. They marched under mingled tricolour and red flags. The stirring tones of the Marseillaise alternated with those of the Internationale. In the crowd were young and old, men and women, workmen and honest burghers, reserve officers in uniform, civil servants. Apart from the political parties of the Left all manner of democratic bodies had sent contingents, the League for the Rights of Man, the World League of Women for Peace, the Committee against War and Fascism, the League against Antisemitism and Racism. They filed past the leaders—Léon Blum, Cachin and Thorez, Daladier and Cot—greeting them with the raised fist that was becoming the rallying sign of the Popular Front. The leaders spoke briefly, Blum among them. And all together the members of the immense crowd

solemnly took the Popular Front oath: to remain united till the Popular Front Programme be carried fully into effect. (For the terms of this programme, see appendix.)

Seldom indeed had Paris seen such a demonstration. It filled the Right with anger. It inspired the Left with further determination to carry on the fight and to win it.

The foreign policy of Laval was bearing bitter fruits. Both main axes of French policy had been smashed. In the agreement Laval had hastened to sign with Mussolini he had, with a blindness that was almost inconceivable, given the Italian dictator a free hand to assail a country that, for good or ill, was a member of the League of Nations.

When wretched Abyssinia, vainly struggling against tanks, modern airplanes and poison gas, appealed to Geneva, Britain took the lead in seeking to apply that "collective security" that had, since 1920, been the axiom of French policy. Even Pierre Laval did not dare openly to refuse sanctions; he accepted them only to render them unworkable. He threw overboard that loyal adherence to the League that had inspired all his predecessors. So doing he drove between Britain and France a dangerous wedge. The *Entente cordiale* was no more; M. Laval's scribes published scurrilous attacks on England the like of which had not been written since the days of the Boer War.

This amazing Minister of Foreign Affairs did his level best to sap two other pillars of French influence. France possessed two staunch friends in Central and South Eastern Europe: Beneš and Titulescu. French agents supported the effort of German intrigues to get rid of Titulescu and were unfortunately successful. When President Mazaryk retired and everyone expected Beneš to have a walk over for the Presidency, it was French money that financed Agrarian opposition to him—an opposition that failed, but not till it had brought Czechoslovakia within an ace of civil war.

As an offset, Laval signed the pact with Soviet Russia. He was practically forced to do so by the pressure brought to bear upon him from several, including high military, quarters. But the pact he signed—and the ratification of which by the Chamber he delayed as long as he possibly could —was only a watered-down version of the pact Barthou had contemplated.

The pro-Fascist, anti-democratic principles that inspired Laval's policy abroad were also noticeable at home. His paid Press pushed mendacity so far as to accuse the Left in general and Léon Blum, the ardent apostle of peace in particular, of wishing to drive France into war. He patronised men like M. Maurras who was not tired in his daily leaders in the *Action Française* of preaching the advisability of murdering Blum and other "scoundrels of the Left". He coldly elbowed aside the

Chamber as much as possible. He introduced the system of government by decrees that, in Germany, in Austria, in Poland had been the first stage in the triumph of Fascism. He bled the country white; civil servants were reduced in numbers and in salaries; unemployment increased apace.

At last, early in 1936, the obedient Chamber revolted. The "mystic" of the Popular Front was beginning to tell on the hesitant Right Wingers of the Radical party. The Laval cabinet was turned out of office. The shadow of a general election was looming on the horizon. Everyone felt that the country was waiting impatiently to go to the polls in order to return the Popular Front to power. The only point left in doubt was how substantial the majority of the Left Government would be.

To bridge over the period before elections, M. Lebrun called upon Senator Albert Sarraut to form a cabinet. Sarraut was the very type of the conservatively-minded, Right Wing Radical Senator, with one ambition in life: to distinguish himself as a political tight-rope dancer. He was a man of loud speeches and feeble actions. His Government included M. Flandin and M. Mandel, the abnormally energetic and able pupil of Georges Clémenceau. M. Frossard, once Leader of French Communism, now eager to temporise with the Right, accepted a seat in this stop-gap administration.

CHAPTER XVIII

ELECTORAL VICTORY: BLUM BECOMES PRIME MINISTER

THE SARRAUT MINISTRY was, as far as home affairs were concerned, somewhat colourless. It disappointed no one, because no one expected it to do anything more than carry on current business. In foreign affairs, unfortunately, it was forced by events outside its control into a most difficult pass. On March 7th, as the culmination of a persistent series of treaty violation, the Dictator of Germany ordered his troops into the demilitarised zone in the Rhineland. It was a violation not only of the Treaty of Versailles which had been imposed on an unwilling Germany, but of that of Locarno which Germany had invited and signed of her own free will. M. Sarraut made resounding speeches, but carefully avoided doing anything to call the German bluff. Bluff it was, for the Reichswehr chiefs, who well knew the impossibility of waging a successful war at that juncture, had only set their army in motion after they had received from Hitler the written order to evacuate the Rhineland without firing a shot if the French should either mobilise or cross the frontier. This passive French acceptance of an accomplished

fact gave the *coup de grâce* to France's prestige in Central and South Eastern Europe. It created a situation which the Blum Government was to inherit and which it became very difficult to redress.

Meantime election preparations were in full swing. Popular Front committees had been formed almost everywhere and were working with a smoothness that augured well for the result of their labours. Suddenly an incident happened that was still further to galvanise the Left, and particularly the Socialist forces.

One morning when M. Monnet, a Socialist deputy and his wife, were driving Blum home from the Chamber, the car had to stop because the street was blocked by the funeral procession of Jacques Bainville, a Royalist journalist and author. The Fascist Leagues had taken the opportunity to parade their forces. Some of the Leaguers recognised Blum in the waiting motor car. They rushed at him with fists and bludgeons. They hit him and his two companions in the most savage manner. Blum, Monnet and Madame Monnet succeeded in gaining the door of a private house, to which they were refused access. But some masons at work on a scaffolding rushed to the rescue, beat back the Leaguers and escorted the three victims of the dastardly assault into the courtyard of the house where they had been working. Blum showed great coolness and courage. Nevertheless the blows and the shock made him bedridden for some weeks.

News of the outrage spread like wildfire. The whole of working-class Paris was in an uproar. A mass demonstration took place that numbered hundreds of thousands. Indignation at this cowardly attempt on the life of the successor of Jaurès was universal thoughout France, and it is probable that it to some degree affected the results of the approaching elections.

It is worth notice that Léon Blum refused to prosecute his attackers. The Radicals showed their esteem for his courage and moderation by announcing that they would not put up a candidate against him in Narbonne.

On January 10th, 1936, the Left Parties had finally agreed on the Popular Front programme. Its main principles had, ever since the oath on July 14th, 1935, been matter of common agreement, but the drafting of the details was a somewhat laborious matter, as might be expected from a political concentration that extended from Right-Wing Radicals to the Communist Party. In Blum's opinion the programme was not radical enough. That indeed was the general feeling among the Socialists. The Radicals, whom Daladier led with more boldness than Herriot had done, might perhaps have been induced to go a little further. Curiously enough it was the Communist party that applied the brakes. The Communists seemed anxious to avoid everything that might frighten away sections of the peasantry and middle classes whose support they deemed essential if

the Popular Front experiment were to be a success.

The first ballot showed, to use a trite electoral phrase that in this case is so true as to be almost unavoidable, a landslide towards the Left. The second ballot, a week later, completed this landslide.

True, the Radicals lost many seats; from 160 they sank to 110. And the Neo-Socialists and little allied groups of the *Union Socialiste Républicaine* met with little success; the electors were not in the mood to favour hybrid parties. But the Socialists from 96 (to which figure they had been reduced by the Neo-Socialists' secession) sprang to 147, while the Communists leaped up to 72.

Never in the course of its history had the French electorate given a more unequivocal verdict. It was comparable to the 1906 general election in Great Britain that swept the Liberals into office, or to Roosevelt's election for a second term of office in the United States. The opposition, save in a few districts—notably in Alsace-Lorraine where local issues intervened—was snowed under.

On the morrow of the election one further fact was clear: the leader of the coming Government would be, could only be, Léon Blum. Perhaps, in that hour of triumph, he may have recalled that line of the Marquis de Posa in Schiller's Don Carlos: "The greatest happiness that can befall a man is to realise in the ripeness of his age a dream of his youth." The succession

of Jean Jaurès had come to him, at least potentially, when he was in the forties. Twenty years later that was given to him which had been withheld from Jaurès: the opportunity to lead his people out of the wilderness into a new and brighter life. The mark of that happiness lay on Blum's face; his gaiety, that never altogether deserts him, was more constant and more serene; his eyes livelier, sunnier and even kindlier than usual.

The French constitution enacts that an interval of one month shall elapse between the elections and the meeting of the new Chamber. The men who drafted the constitution may have had good reasons for this provision, though they are not very apparent. It entails an interregnum. In normal times that may not entail disadvantages. But these were not normal times. The heritage the Blum Government was to take over was by no means made easier by this full month during which the administration in office naturally let things drift and was both unable and unwilling to take any decisions. By the time the new cabinet took office the situation of the national finances had considerably worsened and, as we shall see, a tidal wave of strikes of an unprecedented character had complicated the internal political and economic situation.

Though he could not foresee the details of that interregnum, some apprehensions regarding its consequences were doubtless present in Blum's mind. He had other, more intimate grounds for

tempering his natural delight at the turn of events. He was profoundly touched by the warmth with which he was greeted everywhere and by the high expectations everyone seemed to entertain regarding him. But to his intimate friends he was perfectly frank. To one of them who asked him how he thought he would get on as head of the Government, he replied: "How can I tell how I will do a job I have never attempted before?"

He knew something of the inner workings of a ministry, but to work in a ministry and to lead a Government are two vastly different propositions —the more so since, as he had laid down in his book on governmental reform, he had a very exalted idea of the duties of a Prime Minister; he had gone so far as to liken the Premier to a monarch, who stands above all the departments of State.

In the task of forming his cabinet he allowed himself to be guided by the principles he had laid down in his work on constitutional reform. He set out from the viewpoint that the Prime Minister must not hold any particular ministry, that he must have at his side one or two other Ministers of State without definite portfolios to whom the Premier could depute parts of the work of supervision and co-ordination, and that as far as possible kindred ministries should be grouped.

With these principles in his mind he embarked on the necessary conversations with the various

parties and organisations that formed part of the Popular Front.

The Radicals had been given to understand that the ministries affecting national affairs would be suitable posts for their candidates. M. Daladier was allotted the Ministry of War, M. Pierre Cot that of Air and M. Gasnier-Duparc that of the Navy; these three departments to form a "group" under the general supervision of M. Daladier as Minister of National Defence. Foreign Affairs were offered to Edouard Herriot. But, somewhat to Blum's surprise and greatly to his disappointment, Herriot refused to serve in the cabinet. All efforts to persuade him were in vain. Herriot wished to stand for the Presidency of the Chamber. Next to having him at the Quai d'Orsay, where his knowledge of foreign affairs and his international prestige would have made him invaluable, there was no position which Herriot could fill with greater distinction and usefulness. For Blum the position of President of the Chamber was, it will be recalled, one to which he attached supreme importance for the smooth working of parliamentary institutions. In the end the Quai d'Orsay was entrusted to another Radical, M. Yvon Delbos; a man who had never had any experience of diplomacy, but who had attracted attention by a remarkable attack on Laval's foreign policy in the Chamber some months previously.

The refusal of Herriot to join the cabinet was not the only nor the most severe disappointment

Blum experienced in his task of cabinet building. He had confidently reckoned on Communist participation. The unity of action between the two proletarian parties was steadily ripening into something far more vital: organic unity. It seemed unbelievable that the Communists, who clamoured most loudly for organic unity, should choose to erect a barrier between themselves and the Socialists by refusing to assume their share of governmental responsibility. Utterances by leading Communists had encouraged the expectation that their party would line up with the other Popular Front groups. And Maurice Thorez had, at the important world congress in Moscow in 1935, where the new tactic of mass penetration and defence of democracy was homologated by the Comintern, secured for the French party freedom of action on this very question of participation in a Popular Front cabinet. The Communists pledged themselves to loyal support of the Government—a pledge they fully redeemed even in very delicate circumstances such as the Spanish affair—but firmly declared that in their view they would be more useful as an outside force to permeate and galvanise the masses. They urged further that their presence in the cabinet might prove an impediment to harmony; it was conceivable that issues might arise upon which the Radicals would insist upon a line being taken which Communist ministers would not be able to accept.

Very reluctantly, Blum was forced to accept the Communist decision. Looking back upon it in the light of subsequent events, it may be said that Communist abstention was probably in the main an advantage to the solidity of the Blum cabinet. Acceptance of the non-intervention policy in Spain after that non-intervention had been proved to be a farce would indeed have been impossible to Marcel Cachin and Gabriel Péri for instance, if they had been in the cabinet. Their resignation would, however, have struck a blow that might well have proved deadly. Remaining outside the cabinet, the Communist group could afford on this issue to abstain from voting in the Chamber without thereby imperilling either the existence of the Government or the cohesion of the Popular Front.

The other disappointment was the decision of the C.G.T. to follow the Communist example. There can be no doubt that the inclusion of Léon Jouhaux in the Government would have strengthened its authority with the working masses. The more so since the French Trade Union movement had now become united and that the C.G.T. saw its membership leap from about one million to five million members. But a ruling principle of the C.G.T. had always been to abstain from identifying itself formally with any political party. And its leaders expressed the view that this mighty confederation of labour would be more usefully employed in bringing pressure to bear on the cabinet from outside.

As the Premier's "coadjutors", that is, as Ministers of State without portfolios, Blum chose three representatives of the principal participating groups: Camille Chautemps for the Radicals, Violette for the U.S.R. and his own trusty comrade, the general secretary of his party, Paul Faure, for the Socialists.

The difficult ministry of Finance was entrusted to Vincent Auriol who, as commissioner and then as chairman of the Chamber Commission on Finance, had come to be looked upon as the financial expert of the Socialist group. The capable and energetic Mayor of Lille, Roger Salengro, was put in charge of the Interior. A very able Socialist barrister, Marius Moutet, took over the Colonies. The economist Spinasse and the veteran Lebas added lustre to the Socialist ministerial team.

Faithful to the conceptions outlined in his book on governmental reform, Blum created some entirely novel departments—one of "Leisure Hours and Physical Education" that was entrusted to one of the rising hopes of his party, Léo Lagrange, and one of "Scientific Research" which was honoured by being accepted by Madame Joliat Curie. Two other women were appointed to Under-Secretaryships. For the first time in French history, women were thus to enter the councils of the State.

Though in some respects the cabinet thus showed bold departures from precedent, the work of forming it was comparatively short and easy.

Here again Blum put into practice his own theories: there was no question of endless bargainings; he knew what he wanted; he had his men in his mind's eye; he offered the job to the man he had picked and it was a case of "Yes" or "No". This procedure constituted in itself a complete innovation in French political habits.

The new ministry, when its list was published, was on the whole well received. The Left groups were satisfied; they had given Blum their confidence and he had not deceived it. Apart from a few extremists there was not much criticism even from the Right. This may have been partly due to the fact that the opposition was still stunned by the extent of its electoral defeat. But partly it was due to respect for the clean, business-like way in which the job of cabinet building had been done. As for the public as a whole, even that part of it that had not voted for Popular Front candidates, its attitude was one of relief that the country had at last got out of the rut of ever-changing kaleidoscopic ministries composed of more or less the same old gang in different jobs.

It goes without saying that, before engaging in conversations regarding the new ministry, Léon Blum had secured the assent of his party. On May 10th a national congress of the French Socialist party had formally endorsed the recommendation of the executive committee that Blum should accept the task of forming and leading the cabinet.

For the first time, French Socialists joined a Coalition Government. The circumstances had entirely changed; moreover this was an administration that was to be under Socialist leadership. There could be no question of carrying out the full Socialist programme. But that part of the programme that was approved by the Radicals would be put into practice. And a new spirit could be infused into the entire civil service of the State. Stern measures could be taken against the Leagues. The whole forces of the Republic could be used to hold down, if necessary to crush, those Fascist forces that had sworn the destruction of the Republic. Carried on the crest of a huge wave of popular support, most men of the Left were wholly confident of success. They were inclined to underrate their opponents and the difficulties of the situation both at home and abroad.

Blum was one of the few men in the Popular Front who did not under-estimate these difficulties. Had he been inclined to do so, the events during the last days of the Sarraut Government would have sharply reminded him of them.

A gigantic strike movement set in overnight. It started in two metal works in the Paris area. It spread like wildfire to all the leading Paris works and big stores. It extended all over France. The men struck for higher wages, for better and more hygienic working conditions. In these respects the French working classes had lagged far behind their brethren in Western and Northern Europe,

not to speak of the United States. True they had just won a great electoral victory. Within a few days a Government would be in office pledged to improve working-class conditions. But the workers wanted to make absolutely sure. They knew as well as Blum did himself, that the new cabinet would be a coalition and not a Socialist cabinet. They had had experience of the "social sense" of many leading members of the Radical party. The electoral campaign, by exposing the extent to which France's economic life was dominated by the so-called "Two hundred families" who controlled the Bank of France, had brought home to the people the resistance these financial powers would probably oppose to all reforms. They felt that the Senate was against them. They knew the employers, who in France are conservatively minded to a degree foreign to British or American employers, would fight to the last against higher wages, a forty-hours week, paid holidays and other social reforms.

They instinctively felt that something must be done at the very outset to paralyse that resistance, to strike awe into the hearts of their enemies and at the same time to inspire the coming Blum cabinet with the feeling that it had behind it, not merely a Chamber majority, but the impact of revolutionary masses.

Leaving aside for the moment the question whether the May and June strikes were tactically expedient, the fact remains that they were the

spontaneous result of the highly developed and sound political instinct of the French working classes.

The strikes were marked by a novel departure: they were stay-in strikes. Workshops, factories, stores were occupied by the strikers who ate and slept on the premises. It was in many ways an amazing movement. No damage was done; on the contrary the works were cleaned from top to bottom, the machinery was taken care of, in not a few cases overhauled and repaired. Everything happened in a spirit of great good humour, music and dancing, card playing, football and frolicking. The workers' families brought them food. The shopkeepers contributed foodstuffs and reading material.

The strikes had started under Sarraut. This obsolescent Premier was utterly taken aback. He could not understand this new social phenomenon. He took no measures either to suppress "occupation" or to remove the workers' grievances. He let the movement grow till it was like a tidal wave, and then, perhaps with a secret thrill of malicious satisfaction, handed over this explosive situation to Léon Blum.

CHAPTER XIX

BLUM'S RECORD AS PRIME MINISTER

THE JUNE STAY-IN strike wave stands out in Labour history for several reasons. The rapidity with which it spread. The novel idea of staying-in and therefore, at a time when there was a certain amount of unemployment, preventing the masters from employing black-leg labour. The extraordinary discipline and good humour shown by the strikers. The fact that the men were striking to obtain advantages which, as a result of their electoral victory, were already assured.

The political significance of the movement was far-reaching. It had two facets. The first was the failure of the authorities to take action. Though the whole affair was carried out in peace, order and even with a good deal of humour, the fact remained that it entailed a technical breach of the law—at least of the law of trespass. Yet the Governments concerned did not act. The Sarraut Government, being on its deathbed, was perhaps not capable of action; it was probably, as we have hinted already, not sorry to hand over this critical situation to its successors. And no one could reasonably expect Léon Blum to start his ministerial career by launching the police and

the Mobile Guards against his own staunchest supporters. The second aspect was a psychological one. An electoral victory had been achieved. But it was not the first. On repeated occasions the Left had won general elections, but the Right had, after a brief interval, succeeded in virtually setting aside the verdict of the electorate. The strike wave showed that the working masses were not only determined to prevent a recurrence of this manœuvre, but that they felt themselves strong enough to do so. We will see that for nearly a year this psychological effect of the June strikes endured: the parliamentary opposition dwindled, hid itself, seemed ashamed of its own existence. The employers were for a considerable time cowed and accepted, almost without a murmur, labour legislation the very thought of which would, a few weeks earlier, have made them shudder with horror.

Still Blum was now Premier, head of a Government the duty of which was to govern. An end must be put as quickly as possible to a situation that was not only anomalous, but pregnant with dangerous possibilities. Already certain extremist elements, aided and abetted by *agents provocateurs* of M. Casimir de la Rocque, were trying to force the pace and turn demonstrative strikes into revolutionary ones. Blum's first care was to play the rôle of a conciliator. It was a task eminently suited to his temperament, traditions and aptitudes. This, however, is not synonymous with

saying that it was an easy task. The C.G.T., which had seen its membership suddenly quintupled, could not be expected to have the same measure of control over its members as, say, the British T.U.C. On June 5th the situation was alarming. The idea of a general strike was in the air.

Blum's opinion may be best stated in his own words: "It is thoroughly natural and easy to understand, particularly at the close of a long crisis full of privations and sufferings, that the victory obtained in the political field should create in the working class a determination to see the reforms it has a right to expect as the fruits of its victory, carried into practice." But it followed obviously that the means employed to carry out that determination must not be such as to endanger the whole fabric.

It was in this spirit that in the Hotel Matignon in the rue de Varennes, Léon Blum called together the representatives of masters and men, of Capital and Labour.

It was in that spirit that, with an infinity of pains, a never-failing tact and an appreciation both of vital issues and of technical detail that surprised both his friends and his opponents, he presided over and guided the conference that resulted in the signing of the Matignon Agreements, the "Magna Charta" of French Labour.

Its main provisions were embodied in a series of Bills which, with a rapidity unprecedented in

the history of France or any other country, were submitted to and passed by Parliament.

Premier Blum had, on June 6th, made his bow before the Chamber. Greeted with an ovation from all the deputies of the Popular Front parties, he read out from the tribune his ministerial declaration:

"Gentlemen!

"The Government presents itself to you on the morrow of a general election in which the verdict of universal suffrage was rendered with greater power and clearness than ever before in republican history.

"It has no need to formulate a programme."

That programme was sufficiently known; it had been drafted and proclaimed by the Popular Front. It embraced a forty-hours week, paid holidays, collective contracts, national control over war industries, State control over the Bank of France, increase of purchasing power of the masses and revision of the cuts in Civil Service salaries and ex-soldiers' pensions. In the foreign field, policy could be expressed in one short sentence:

"The will of the country is evident. It wants peace!"

The Chamber's applause that had punctuated the reading of the declaration, broke out with redoubled force after this sentence. He had but little to add: a pledge that was kept up to the last day of his tenure of office:

"Faithful observance of our engagements, such

will be our guiding rule. The common weal, such will be our purpose."

The opposition spokesmen played a perfunctory part in this full-dress debate. The order of the day expressing confidence in the Blum cabinet was passed by 384 to 210 votes. This majority did not crumble away; it remained loyal to the very end.

The same declaration was, as is customary, read out in the Senate. In the Chamber it had been greeted with rousing cheers; even on some benches outside or at least on the fringe of Popular Front orthodoxy. In the Senate it was received with silence. The handful of Socialists applauded; there was a timid echo on some of the Radical benches. It was evident that the Senate was sulking.

The day before, Léon Blum had made a direct appeal to the country. He had briefly recounted the Popular Front programme. He had exhorted the masters to show wisdom, the workers to give an example of maturity of judgement.

These were indeed full days and nights. For it was in the night from June 6th to 7th that he succeeded in persuading the opposing parties to endorse the Matignon Agreements. They were actually signed in the morning of June 7th by the general Secretary of the C.G.T., Léon Jouhaux, and by the President of the General Confederation of Producers, M. Duchemin. They set the example for the collective contracts of which some 6,000

have been concluded at the time of writing. Trade Union rights and liberties were for the first time clearly laid down and unequivocally recognised. Workers' delegates were given a status. Wages were fixed.

This marked far more than the end of an industrial dispute; it was the beginning of a new era in the relations between capital and labour in France. In six hours' negotiations millions of French workers had obtained that which Léon Blum's organ, *Le Populaire*, declared they had never hoped to secure in twenty years of struggle. Labour had its code and a legal revolution of the whole structure of Society had been inaugurated.

With ruthless energy, Blum set to work to place that revolution on the statute book. On June 9th three Bills were tabled: a forty hours working week Bill, a paid holidays Bill and a collective contracts Bill. Blum had not only conceived and negotiated them in principle; he did the actual drafting himself. He explained and defended them in the Chamber and in the Senate. The latter was still sulky, but it was impressed by the strength of the current of public opinion; reluctantly it gave its consent. By June 26th all three Bills had become the law of the land.

In other directions the cabinet had acted with the same decision and swiftness. The cuts in Civil Service salaries and in ex-soldiers' pensions had been abolished. On June 18th a decree had dissolved the Fascist Leagues. This prompt handling

of the situation, all the more remarkable in a country where political changes usually take a long time to assume practical shape, was not lost on the country. By June 15th work had been generally resumed in the metal industry. By the beginning of July there were practically no strikes on either in Paris or in the rest of France. The French workers, proud of their victory, turned to the pleasant task of deciding how they could best spend the paid holidays they were, for the first time, to enjoy.

The internal situation had within a few weeks become normal. Unfortunately the foreign situation suddenly became acute. In pursuance of a plot hatched by General Sanjurjo in Berlin in the early spring, a number of Spanish generals on July 18th, rose in rebellion against the Madrid Popular Front Government. Since the bulk of the army was on the rebel side, the Government had to rely on the masses. These were hastily armed with what war material happened to be at hand. There can be no doubt that, had Germany and Italy not thrown their weight on the rebel side, the whole rebellion would have collapsed in a few weeks. But the Government's levies were ill fitted to cope with troops provided with military airplanes, tanks, anti-aircraft guns and modern artillery.

It was clear to Blum from the first day that this Spanish civil war was bound to affect France. The "Frente Popular" was the twin brother of

the French Popular Front. The two nations are racially so closely connected that tragic events in the one country could not but have repercussions in the other. But what does not appear to have been sufficiently clear to the French Foreign Office at the very start was the extent to which the rising was an Italian- and German-made affair. Had the truth been known on this point, it would have been fairly easy to have in the first fortnight of the struggle sold enough war material to the Spanish Republic to assure its success. France could have done so at that time without incurring the slightest risk of complications. She would have avoided the extremely grave situation that arose later when Italians and Germans were found sitting astride France's vital communications with her North African empire, and the further prospect of having in the event of a European war a third frontier to defend against an invader.

That possibility of help without incurring risks was, however, of very short duration. It became evident that Germany and Italy had staked a great deal on this Spanish card and that French interference would entail grave danger of war.

Despite that danger, there was among the French Left masses a strong impulse to assist the Spanish Government by men, money and arms. That wish to assist in this way was unquestionably the state of mind of many members of the Blum cabinet. Blum himself would have been faithless to all his ideals if he had not personally shared that impulse.

But the test of statesmanship is the ability to take long historic views and to prefer them to even the most legitimate of impulses. Mr. Walter Crotch, the well known writer on foreign affairs, in an article in the *Quarterly Review* (1937) stated Blum's position in a very fair and judicious manner:

"Léon Blum hitherto known as a Socialist theoretician, as a cultured and eloquent party leader, has stood this test of statesmanship. He did not allow himself to be swamped by the zeal and ardour of his troops, an enthusiasm which he doubtless shares to the fullest extent. He realised with the broader and yet exacter view of the statesman, that the popular conception of the Spanish Civil war as an episode in a world-wide duel between Fascism and Communism was, if not completely false, at least a highly dangerous half-truth. He saw the Spanish rebellion as it really is: the work of certain powerful Spanish financial and vested interests whose act of self-defence was the convenient if not the complaisant instrument of two foreign Powers, namely Germany and Italy. He perceived that to range France behind the Madrid Government would be playing the very game for which Berlin and Rome devoutly hoped. He saw that this was the shortest way to cementing the scarce concluded union of these two strong Fascist States and to provoke a war which would find France in an unfavourable strategic situation. There appeared to be but one way out

of the difficulty, once these transparent truths had been solidly grasped, and that lay along the road of strict and unvarying neutrality. Unhappily, in this case neutrality was a path beset with many snares and pitfalls. Neutrality between countries at war is a comparatively easy thing. One either sells war material to both parties or abstains from supplying it to both. In a civil war, the problem presents a different aspect. One of the combatants is a regularly constituted Government with which normal friendly relations exist no matter what its political complexion. The other combatant—quite irrespective of the merits or demerits of his cause —is an outlaw; he has no international status; he cannot be arraigned for damages to life or property or neutrals; his flag is not recognised; his ships, if he have any, are in law merely pirates, liable to be sunk at sight by anybody. A mere declaration of neutrality in these circumstances is an idle gesture, for you cannot, for instance, refuse to implement contracts passed with a friendly Government. To do so in the name of neutrality would be to commit an unfriendly act towards that Government and would be a breach of neutrality in itself.

"That is the legal, the juridical, point of view. In the case of France it happened to run parallel with the popular point of view, with the openly avowed desire of most of M. Léon Blum's followers and even with the personal wishes of the Prime Minister himself.

"But the statesman triumphed over the lawyer, the politician and the man. The French Government took the lead, proclaimed a self-denying ordinance inhibiting supplies of war material to either side and appealed to the other Powers to follow this example and to issue a joint declaration in this sense."

Léon Blum went to London to launch this policy of Non-intervention. His lead was followed not only by Britain but by every other power. Even Germany, Italy and Portugal, the three accomplices of the Spanish rebels, at least pretended to accept the formula. The danger of a European war arising out of the Spanish crisis had, in August, been very urgent and grave. Immediate conflict was avoided thanks to Léon Blum's initiative.

That Non-intervention in the long run proved to be a tragic farce does not in the least detract from Blum's merit in proposing that policy. The carrying out of a policy is something entirely independent of its intrinsic merits. At the time of writing the end of the Spanish civil war is not in sight but, at least, European peace has been preserved so far. It may be that this same end might have been achieved had the Powers that stand for peace realised earlier the practical failure of Non-intervention in the presence of its persistent sabotage by Germany and Italy. But that was a decision that no longer rested in the hands of the

French cabinet; departure from the policy adopted could only be decided by an international body, the Committee of Non-intervention.

No measures of the Blum cabinet encountered such strong opposition among its own followers as its attitude in the Spanish question. Matters went so far that it looked as if the Communists would vote against the Government on this issue. There was a dramatic debate in the Chamber. The Communist spokesmen, Thorez and Duclos, delivered speeches that appeared to make a breach likely. Blum did not shirk the issue any more than he had, some weeks before, when facing a tumultuous meeting of his own party, with thousands yelling: "*Blum à l'action! Des canons, des avions pour l'Espagne!*"

At the last minute the Communists shrank from assuming the responsibility for breaking up the Popular Front. They gave evidence of statesmanship and loyalty; but no greater than that which, often with a heavy heart, Blum had repeatedly given himself.

Throughout his tenure of the premiership, Léon Blum was too much absorbed by the home situation to give daily close attention to foreign affairs. Faithful to his own conception of the duties of a Prime Minister, he was content to give general directives and had to entrust the carrying out of them to the Quai d'Orsay. It is no unkind reflection on the men who did this work to note that they were on a vastly different mental plane from

that of Léon Blum and there were many shrewd observers who regretted that the Premier did not exercise more detailed control over Foreign Policy. Be that as it may, it cannot be doubted that his influence was both profound and beneficent.

His directives may be fairly summed up in a few words. The maintenance of peace at any price save that of dishonour—that is, abandonment of France's sovereign liberties or disloyalty to France's friends and allies. Loyalty to the League of Nations, collective security and the ideal of disarmament. Good relations with every Power irrespective of the political régime in authority there. Closest possible relations with Great Britain and the United States which, with France, he considers constitute the bulwark of democracy and civic liberties in the world.

At a speech in Lyons early in 1937, Blum stated these principles in such clear and impressive manner that they attracted universal attention and praise. The voice of criticism was stilled even in Berlin and in Rome; not that the desire to criticise was absent, but that the speech simply offered no opening for criticism. The prestige of France, we have noted, had sunk very low at the time when Blum took office. His clear, frank, loyal policy brought about a complete change. France under his leadership compelled the respect of her foes and strengthened the affection of her friends.

Writing as we do so close after the event, this biography cannot purport to give more than a very rough summary of the actual achievements of his ministry. Enough time has not elapsed to give the would-be historian the necessary distance for impartial judgement. And it is obvious that the "secret history" of the Blum cabinet cannot be written at a time when its members are still in the front line of the political fight. All that can be done is to outline the concrete legislative achievements, to pick out one or two salient incidents and attempt to convey an impression of the general way in which Blum carried out in practice his conception of the rôle of a Prime Minister.

In addition to the laws already mentioned, a number of far reaching measures were put through Parliament in record time. These included the progressive nationalisation of the armaments industry, the creation of a Wheat Office which gave the farmers security of price, and a complete reorganisation of the Bank of France in a democratic sense, to take it away from control of a few big trusts and wealthy families, to make it the instrument of the State instead of, as heretofore its master. An arbitration machinery was set up to deal with labour disputes. Administrative reforms went hand in hand with these legislative measures. This was more pronounced in some ministries than in others, but the general effect was to create the impression that a new breeze

was blowing throughout the Civil Service. In North Africa strong measures were taken to curb certain subversive tendencies which, encouraged and subsidised by German and Italian agents, threatened to become a danger. In the French mandated territories of Syria and Lebanon independence was granted to the population and a treaty of alliance was concluded with the new-born Republic.

Along the entire political front rapid progress was recorded. Never had any French Government achieved so much in so short a time. Never had the feeling been so widespread that there was a Government in office that knew its own mind and was determined to act up to it.

There was one exception: finance. The financial situation inherited by the Blum administration had been most critical. The treasury was almost empty. Current revenue returns did not meet ordinary current expenditure. The fatal Laval policy of curtailing the spending power of the public had had disastrous effects on commerce and industry.

The general directives given by Blum in this matter were fundamentally akin to those of the Roosevelt administration. The main principle was to increase public purchasing power and thereby revive trade, increase production and strengthen revenue returns. The mischief was that a relatively long time must elapse before the increase in public purchasing power could produce its beneficent effects. The problem was how to bridge over that

time of waiting. An internal loan was tried. It was a failure because the Right opposition, beaten in the political field, took its revenge in the financial field. Working men, civil servants, Trades Unions subscribed to the loan. Some of the leading Paris banks, under Government pressure, did likewise. But the provincial banks sulked. Country lawyers advised their customers to hold back.

Within a few months the cabinet had been driven into an impasse. There were two ways out. One was strongly urged by the Communists: to revise the whole system of taxation along English lines and impose much heavier burdens on the rich. The other was a moderate devaluation of the Franc. The latter course was decided on. It gave Léon Blum the opportunity to go a long step in the direction of what had ever been his dream: close co-operation between the three great democracies of France, Britain and America. The Franc was brought into line—subject to a small floating margin—with the pound and the dollar, and a currency agreement between the three Powers formed the basis for close future co-operation both in economics and in general policy.

The devaluation brought relief for a time. But it entailed a number of disadvantages, particularly that of a considerable rise in the cost of living. This opened vistas of a vicious circle between rises in wages and in prices. Moreover the measure provided an apparent excuse for the possessing classes to intensify their activity in depositing their

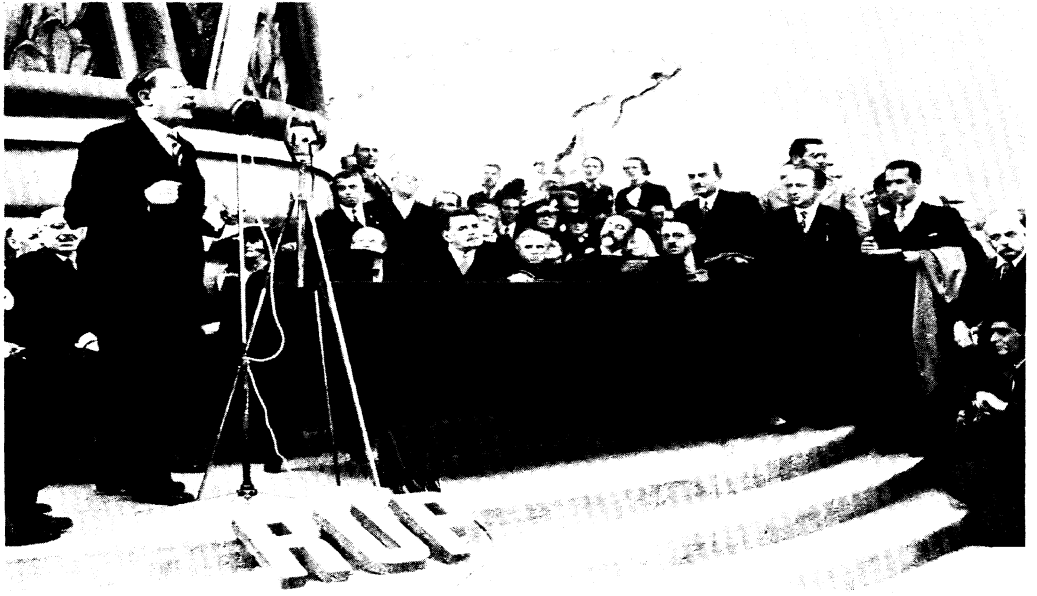
gold abroad and in selling out of French estate in order to buy foreign securities. The opposition was encouraged by the atmosphere of distrust thus created, to take the offensive. The effects of the forty-hour week, of paid holidays, of the nationalisation of armament works, on costs of production were consciously and wildly exaggerated. A campaign of hideous calumny started against the cabinet as a whole, and some of its members in particular. The victim specially aimed at was the Minister of Interior, Roger Salengro. A Right weekly, *Gringoire*, which had richly earned the name of "*la feuille infâme*" (the infamous sheet) accused Salengro of having deserted and betrayed France during the war. It asserted that he had been sentenced by a field court martial and that it was only due to political influences that he had escaped the just fate of traitors. There was not a shred of truth in these assertions. Salengro had been captured at the front while engaged in trying to bring in from no-man's-land the body of an officer. He had appeared before a court martial in the usual course and had been acquitted. He was indeed sentenced by another court martial —but it was a German court martial, that had found him guilty of exciting French prisoners of war to insubordination against their German jailers. These facts were clearly established from army records. A debate took place in the Chamber. Blum flew to the defence of his friend, who had a magnificent record of public service as Mayor of

Lille, the Manchester of France. It was a speech vibrant with suppressed indignation, but packed with facts marshalled with that clearness of which Blum is a master. Only a handful of irreconcilable partisans ventured to vote against Salengro. His vindication had been not only complete but brilliant.

But the incident had a tragic sequel. Salengro, a highly strung and very sensitive man, had borne up well during these cruel attacks on his honour. When they were dispelled, he collapsed. In a moment of nervous breakdown he committed suicide. A wave of indignation swept over France. Huge masses paraded in Paris in memory of the man whom political opponents had murdered as surely as if they had used a knife or a gun. Léon Blum, grievously affected, with Edouard Herriot at his side, attended the funeral of Salengro at Lille: scores of thousands of working men and humble folk marched by.

The immediate consequence was the tabling of a Press Bill, drafted along the lines of the libel law in England and in America. It was passed by the Chamber and pigeon-holed by the Senate.

Meanwhile the financial situation was giving occasion for new anxiety. The extremely critical nature of the international situation, due to the armaments and the perpetual provocations of the Fascist powers, rendered it imperative that France should spend seven additional milliards of francs on armaments. To raise this sum a loan was



LEON BLUM SPEAKING AT THE FOOT OF THE PEACE COLUMN AT THE PARIS EXHIBITION, AUGUST, 1937

necessary. Experience had shown that a loan would only succeed if the possessing classes saw fit to back it. This and the difficulty of raising money required to finance further social reforms induced Blum to proclaim a "pause". To give the country time to recover its financial breath, he pledged himself that the despatch of social legislation would be interrupted for a while. There was no question of abandoning the aims of the Popular Front, merely of moderating the pace for a time. The announcement had the desired effect. The loan was over-subscribed. But it undoubtedly caused some uneasiness among the Socialist and Communist masses, though out of loyalty to the Popular Front their deputies did not oppose the decision in Parliament.

One further incident calls for mention in this succinct review of the history of the Blum administration: the Clichy riots. It calls for special mention because of the deep impression it made on Léon Blum himself.

Despite the dissolution of the Fascist leagues some of them continued to exist under the cloak of political parties; thus the *Croix de Feu* of Colonel Casimir de la Rocque had been transformed into the *Parti Social Français*. This organisation announced that it would hold a social evening in a picture house in the heart of Clichy, one of the reddest working class districts of suburban Paris. The Mayor of Clichy, Auffray, a Socialist deputy, asked Minister of the Interior Dormoy,

who had succeeded Salengro, to prohibit the meeting as likely to lead to disturbances. But Dormoy let things take their course. The Clichy Socialists and Communists summoned their followers to a counter-demonstration. Strong forces of police and Mobile Guards were concentrated at Clichy. Owing probably to the action of Fascist *agents provocateurs* in the crowd, matters took a tragic turn. The Guards fired.

Léon Blum was in a box at the Opéra at an Anglo-French State performance when the Paris correspondent of the London *News Chronicle* brought him the news of Sir Austen Chamberlain's death. Greatly distressed at the death of one who had been so great a soldier of peace, Blum scribbled in pencil on his programme a moving message of sympathy to the British people. He had just finished when the grave news of the firing in Clichy reached him. He sent his trusted *chef de Cabinet*, Blumel, to Clichy to try and restore order.

Blumel had hardly arrived in front of Clichy Town Hall when he was grievously wounded by a bullet. Thanks to the coolness of the Left leaders on the spot peace was restored, but the roll-call of the Clichy dead had mounted to six. Blum and his wife drove immediately to the hospital to visit and comfort the wounded. Truth to tell Léon Blum himself needed comfort. It was almost unbelievable for him that the forces of his Government should have fired, should perhaps have had

to fire, on the working masses that were his own supporters and friends. An enquiry was of course ordered. But for a number of days Léon Blum remained in a state of great depression. He very seriously contemplated leaving the captain's bridge. It needed all the affectionate pressure of his friends and all his sense of duty to the Socialist cause to induce him to give up this fateful plan and to remain at his post of command.

CHAPTER XX

THE FIGHT WITH THE SENATE

DURING THE GREATER part of his tenure of office, Léon Blum's qualities as "leader of the house" had more occasion to show themselves in crises within the Popular Front itself, than in straight fights with the opposition.

Coalitions are at the best of times awkward things to lead. The fact that this particular one comprised four parties of which one, far the most combative and explosive, was not represented in the cabinet, rendered the problem peculiarly difficult. The Communists had only themselves to blame for having remained outside the holy of holies. They had been urgently pressed to come in, but, rightly or wrongly, they had believed that their assistance would be more effective if they remained outside. This may have been so, but they soon had occasion to realise that this position as auxiliaries had its disadvantages. This was particularly the case in Foreign Affairs. The foreign policy of the Popular Front Government, the department of state upon which Blum's influence was least constant, was from the start of the Spanish civil war and during the resultant complications with Germany and Italy a permanent

subject of sharp criticism by the Communist leaders.

To keep things going smoothly under these conditions made extraordinarily high demands upon Blum's moral courage, tact and suppleness.

The opposition was weak; far from making full use of the opportunities for sound parliamentary action provided by the presence of 210 Right deputies in the Chamber and the fact that some twenty or thirty members of the Right Wing of the Radical Socialist party were merely waiting for a safe opportunity to turn their coats, the Right showed itself effete to a degree. It seldom deployed its full parliamentary strength. It opposed with its lips every one of Blum's great social Bills but many of its members shrank from actually casting their votes against what they felt to be measures popular in the country at large.

The personnel of the opposition hardly lent itself to co-ordinated action. Tardieu was a back number. Laval, who never numbered lack of intelligence among his defects, doubtless realised that the best service he could render Blum was to assume a leading part in opposing him, and kept very still indeed. There remained Flandin, Mandel, Reynaud and the smaller, very vocal but singularly ineffective fry—Taittingers, de Kérillis, Henriots and consorts.

These latter kept up incessant wordy warfare which no one, save themselves, took seriously.

The other three were of bigger calibre, but each had his disabilities.

Paul Reynaud, who had succeeded in building up a considerable reputation as a financial technician, was for the first year of the cabinet's life hampered by the fact that he toyed with the hope of entering it. When, in June, 1937, he realised that this hope was vain, it was a little late in the day.

Pierre Etienne Flandin did his best. It was a pretty poor best, which was not altogether his fault, for people were inclined to look upon him as a man who had had his chance and had made nothing of it.

Jéroboam Mandel was of very different stuff. Extremely able, hard and cynical, the pupil of Clémenceau, he was the cabinet's most redoubtable potential enemy. But he was much too shrewd to embark on a forlorn hope with so disorganised a rabble as the Right opposition. Moreover, on foreign affairs he disagreed very profoundly with the bulk of that unthinking opposition. He played a lone hand lurking in the shade, waiting for an opportunity, after the manner of his old chief, "Tiger" Clémenceau, to leap at the Government's throat.

The opposition as a whole, while generally avoiding pitched parliamentary battles, had recourse to other weapons. It may be doubted whether any cabinet has ever had to meet more tortuous and disloyal manœuvres than has the Blum administration.

These manœuvres were varied. *Agents provocateurs* were liberally employed during the great strike wave to try and excite the workers to unreasonable excesses; this attempt was foiled by the common sense of the masses and the comparative discipline of the trade unions. A concerted attempt was then made to put up prices far beyond the degree of increase that could be justified by the rise in wages or the devaluation of the franc, this effort was in a large measure successful but the result disappointed its authors, for the "mystic" of the Popular Front proved stronger than dissatisfaction with the rising cost of living. Despite everything, at every by-election, the electors kept on voting for the Blum candidates in a steadily increasing proportion. Campaigns of slander in part of the Press were set afoot, taking advantage of the extraordinarily lax libel laws in France. With a lack of patriotic sentiment verging on treason, certain opposition newspapers vied with each other in publishing stories, exaggerated or invented, that kept the Fascist governments of Germany and Italy supplied with arguments with which to damage France. In certain quarters of the Right an insidious campaign was launched, extending its field of operations even to many foreign countries, the object of which was to sabotage the Paris Exhibition of 1937 to which the Government looked for help to meet the increasing financial difficulties. But the most pertinacious of these opposition manœuvres were exerted in two directions: an

attempt to destroy public confidence in French Bonds and French Credit, and the misuse of the delaying powers held by the Senate under the constitution of the Republic.

The curious thing was that, on paper, the 1936-37 Senate had a Left majority. Its three slices of one third had been successively elected before the great Popular Front wave had swept the country, yet the majority of the senators belonged to the Republican Left, which is supposed to be, if not identical with, at least closely related to the Radical-Socialist party. On paper, then, the Senate was for the Popular Front; in reality it was very conservatively Republican and had neither understanding for, nor sympathy with, the close alliance of Herriot's and Daladier's party with such "rampant revolutionaries" as the Socialists or Communists. If these venerable senators were Radicals, they were Radicals of a type that would, in England of old, have seemed Tory to a Whig.

Their republicanism would have made them offer stout resistance to any kind of Fascist adventure, but their conservatism made them look upon Léon Blum the Socialist with hostile suspicion.

Perhaps, too, they felt that Blum did not treat them with the full meed of respect they thought was their due. Reading over Léon Blum's parliamentary speeches as Premier one is struck with a vital difference between his speeches in the Chamber and in the Senate. In the Chamber,

where he had a sure majority, he nevertheless exerted all his powers of logic and persuasion; he wanted to convince the deputies and not be content to rely on the mechanical work of the party whips. In the Senate, on the other hand, he wasted no such intellectual effort but adopted a kind of "take it or leave it" attitude.

The leaders of the Right opposition in the Senate, with the exception of the extinct volcano Laval, were even less efficient than their colleagues in the Chamber. But there were nominal Radicals like Caillaux, Malvy and Régnier—able men, former ministers, who felt themselves relegated to frigid shade by the younger and more radical generation. They led the revolt. They engineered the coup that was to bring Blum to a fall.

By the middle of June, 1937, the financial situation, thanks in part at least to that campaign of sabotage and export of capital we have mentioned earlier, had grown critical. Léon Blum had strained every nerve to win the confidence of the possessing classes. He had failed, not because his policy was bad or his appeals unskilful, but because the leaders of those possessing classes were determined to close their eyes to everything save the frantic desire to get rid of Blum. Let the finances of France, the credit of France go to the Devil, so Blum went to the Devil too. It became obvious to every one that there was only one way out. Since these people could not be won, they must be coerced. Or at least the Government must receive special

powers, subject to parliamentary ratification, to put the financial house in order.

Proposals were tabled. Powers were asked for. The proposals were far from harsh from the viewpoint of capital; they were not even tinged with the slightest hue of Socialism. So little so that the Communists at first refused to endorse them. There was a long and dramatic sitting of the Chamber under the shadow of a Communist threat to abstain from voting. But when it was clear that such a course would mean the disruption of the Popular Front and the end of the Blum experiment, the French Communist leaders swung round and loyally kept their pact with their allies. Some twenty Right Wing Radicals who had from the outset been potential coat-turners, deserted the Government. But the Chamber by a majority of ninety-nine granted the plenary powers.

The Bill was sent to the Senate. It was not the first time that the Senate had granted plenary powers; it had given them to Doumergue and to Laval. But what the supposedly "Left" Senate had given these Right premiers it refused to give to the Socialist Blum. By 188 votes to 72 the Senate substituted for the Bill as passed by the Chamber a text of its own which not only curtailed the powers asked for but emptied them of all contents and significance.

Léon Blum manœuvred with great skill. He did not, on that fateful 19th of June, put the question of confidence to the Senate. For one thing

he did not recognise the right of a house elected on an undemocratic suffrage to dismiss a cabinet responsible to the popularly elected house. For another he wanted to make it clear to the country that, at a time when hours counted if action were to save the financial situation, the Senate had deliberately sacrificed national interests to political designs. Last and not least he wished to make it obvious that, constitutionally speaking, this was not a conflict between the cabinet and the Senate, but between the two houses of parliament.

On the same day, later on in the evening, the Chamber by a majority of ninety-eight votes summarily rejected the text adopted by the Senate. If Caillaux and his fellow ex-Radicals in the Senate had hoped that their example would be followed by the bourgeois members of the Popular Front in the Chamber, they were disillusioned: the Government's majority on the plenary powers remained intact.

The night did not appreciably weaken the resistance of the Senators, led by that old but indomitable stormy petrel Caillaux. Léon Blum was well aware that the fate of his Government was at stake. He let it be known that unless a sufficient measure of exceptional powers were given him by the next morning, Monday, he would resign. But his serenity was unbroken. He felt that he had behind him not only a compact majority in the Chamber, but the great masses in the country. The normal way out of such a

situation under most parliamentary régimes is an appeal to the country, but, apart from the fact that there was only one precedent for dissolving the Chamber in the history of the Third Republic (in 1874), this device seemed on this occasion well-nigh impossible. It would have meant an interregnum of three months which was far more than sufficient to shatter irremediably the finances and the credit of France.

One who was very close to the Prime Minister said on the Sunday morning: "If the worst comes to the worst we will resign. But we will come back. Neither the Chamber nor the masses will tolerate any but a Popular Front Cabinet."

Léon Blum and Vincent Auriol, the Minister of Finance, appeared on the Sunday morning before the Senate Finance Commission. Blum made an impressive declaration; it was brief, but lucid and to the point. It shook even his most hardened opponent Caillaux, who turned to Blum and said: "Why not try a friendly talk between the Finance Minister and the Reporter of the Finance Commission?"

"Why not?" replied Léon Blum with a smile. The door was thus left just ajar for a compromise. The Radical Socialists, who justly feared that they would become the most hard-hit victim if a break occurred, exerted themselves with might and main to open the door wider. A meeting of the co-ordinating committee of the Popular Front parties in the Chamber was called. A new formula

was devised: it upheld the principle of plenary powers but made some considerable concessions to the Senate's point of view. Contrary to the fears of many, the spokesman of the Communist party endorsed the compromise. By some, Blum was expected to reject it; by not a few he was actually advised to do so. By remaining adamant, they said, he would force the issue and it was believed that a large majority of the country would support him. Once more, Blum showed himself to be a statesman rather than a mere party politician. He accepted the compromise, which was duly sent up to the Senate.

It was generally expected that the Senate would accept it. Well-informed people went about saying: "The crisis is over!"

It was not, however. Caillaux had tasted blood and liked the taste of it. He had visions of a purely Radical Socialist Government, with himself and his friends as advisers, the hated Socialists and Communists in the cool shades of opposition; such a Government would call itself "Left" but would go so cannily that it would receive the support of all save a few of the Right extremists. He swung the Senate Finance Commission to reject the compromise.

The whole of that Sunday all political Paris was in a state of fever. All, perhaps, save Léon Blum, who smiled and chatted with his colleagues as if there were no question of the life of his cabinet being at stake. This was not due to lightheartedness

but to fortitude. Those who were near him that day were enabled to take the full measure of the man.

At nine o'clock in the evening, after hours of frenzied conversations and negotiations between Caillaux on the one hand and Vincent Auriol on the other, the Senate met in plenary session.

Léon Blum made a supreme appeal to the upper house. He stated that he had never had any illusions concerning the feelings the Senate had towards his Government.

"This state of mind," he said, "has manifested itself continuously for a year despite all the guarantees we gave of our will to serve above all the interests of the nation. It has shown itself in perpetual restrictions and limitations, in occasional impediments, often in anxious reproaches the sum total of which could not but hamper our action somewhat seriously. . . . Yet until to-day we had never encountered any open resistance, any categorical opposition."

This he ascribed to the fact that the Senate realised that the Government had the people behind it.

"Gentlemen," he asked, "has that situation in the country altered? You know it has not."

The point was greeted with ringing cheers by the little band of Government supporters. Half an hour before, the results of three by-elections had become known, all of them brilliant successes for the Popular Front; in one of them Jacques

Doriot, the leader of the "Liberty Front" that aimed at polarising the Right opposition to Blum, had been defeated in his own home town by an overwhelming majority.

"We have accepted," he went on to say, "the compromise proposal to use special powers only when parliament is in session. It is a new idea. So far as I know no one has hitherto used plenary powers save in the absence of parliament. We are ready to try out the experiment with parliament—but it must be with a parliament both Chambers of which have confidence in us."

He sketched out the situation as he saw it. All he asked the Senate to do was to give the Government a chance to meet that situation. He then summed up the reproaches hurled at his Government of having shown gross incompetence, of having led the country to ruin and bankruptcy.

"If this be so," he asked forcibly, "how is it the Government remains as popular as ever? How is it it has retained the undiminished confidence of the workers in the fields and in the cities? How is it that it is highly considered, nay respected, by international opinion?

"We do not look upon the work we have achieved in this one year with regret or contrition. We look upon it with a sentiment of pride—as we believe, of legitimate pride. We have prevented Republican order from being impaired. We have smoothed down the most formidable social conflict France has known for sixty years past. We have

built up a set of laws regarding labour that have radically altered conditions of human life in our country. It may be true that these laws have placed France in an exposed situation among the industrial countries of the world, but you may perceive that their force of attraction is manifesting itself beyond our frontiers, while at home it constitutes an element of civic concord and of national cohesion.

"We have dragged French economic activity out of the mudhole in which it had slipped owing to the world crisis. Doing so we have opened the door for a possible financial restoration.

"We will leave the Republic stronger at home and stronger abroad because we have strengthened the attachment of the masses to Republican régime.

"We await with a clear conscience the verdict of our contemporaries, the justice of the people."

In closing, he put a straight question to the Senate: "Do you believe that certain threatened interests should be allowed to counteract the will of the people expressed by universal suffrage?

"Gentlemen, that is the question that dominates this debate. It is a question the Senate can settle by a vote of which it must perceive the supreme importance."

This speech was Blum's swan-song as Premier of the first Popular Front cabinet. It was the speech of a man who, above all other considerations, placed care for the defence of democratic institutions.

It swayed some votes in the Senate. But, after a halting utterance by Caillaux who thought it necessary to assure the house that he was actuated by no personal feelings of animosity, the upper house rejected the Chamber's compromise motion by 168 votes to 96. Caillaux, to whom in 1925 Herriot and Blum had refused plenary powers, had waited twelve years for his revenge; he had it now.

As soon as the figures were read out, Léon Blum and his ministerial colleagues rose and filed silently out of the Senate to hold their last cabinet council in the Hotel Matignon.

On the question of resignation there appears to have been no difference of opinion. The French constitution did not provide for a remedy to so sharp a conflict between the two houses of parliament save by a dissolution which the extreme gravity and urgency of the financial situation ruled out of the question. To go outside strict observance of constitutional usage was a thought that could not even occur to a Government pledged above all to the defence of democracy. Some ministers wanted Blum to go to the Chamber —which had been waiting for hours—and make a last declaration. Léon Blum dissented: he felt that to do so might envenom still further the relations between the two houses whereas the interests of the country demanded their speedy reconciliation.

Shortly before 3 a.m. Léon Blum called the Press into his office. The journalists took their seats

in the gilt and velvet armchairs. The magnesium flashes of the Press photographers showed a Blum full of smiles, not in the least cast down by this sudden adversity.

He read out a declaration announcing the resignation of his ministry; he had himself carefully revised its text. It closed with the words:

"Being deprived of the means of action which we deem indispensable, we retire. Before doing so we have a double task to fulfil.

"We express to the majority in the Chamber and to our friends in the Senate, who, for over a year, have so manfully and devotedly supported our efforts, our affectionate gratitude.

"We address to those who, throughout the country have massed themselves in the Popular Front, a most pressing appeal to keep cool. It is essential that the transfer of ministerial powers be effected quietly and peacefully according to Republican legal order. This the interests of the country demand. We ask all our friends in the whole of France to give us this last proof of their confidence in us."

Having read out his statement, Blum chatted gaily for a few moments with his colleagues. Blumel, his *chef de cabinet*, with mock seriousness recited the first few lines of the death of Socrates.

Robert Blum, Léon's son, came in and helped him on with his overcoat, for though it was June the night was bitterly cold. With French impulsiveness, the various ministers embraced each other.

Blum looked at them and laughingly said to his son:

"There is high festival to-night at the Austrian Embassy!"—a historical quotation of amusing aptness in the circumstances.

As the retiring ministers entered their automobiles to proceed to the Élysée where the President of the Republic was waiting to receive their collective resignation, secretaries, civil servants, typists, telephone girls, telegraph and messenger boys crowded the old stone courtyard of the Hotel Matignon.

"Vive Blum! Vive Blum!" they shouted and raised their clenched fists in Popular Front salute.

On the pavement outside stood an old man, leaning on his daughter. As Blum's car swung out of the gate, he said to her: "There goes a great and honest servant of the people!"

Léon Blum, when in the fullness of time he shall have accomplished his task, could wish for no finer verdict.

CHAPTER XXI

LEON BLUM AS VICE-PREMIER

THE MINISTERIAL CRISIS was very short. The new cabinet was presided over by M. Chautemps. Some of the Socialist ministers were dropped, others exchanged one office for another. Two of Blum's pet ideas were dropped: the participation of women and a department of scientific research. But the Popular Front programme remained. The time was the same, but it was understood that it would be played with the soft pedal.

Blum accepted to serve under Chautemps in the same spirit of loyalty with which Chautemps and his Radical friends had accepted to serve under him. Though as Vice-Premier he no longer held the dominant position in the cabinet, he remained the dominant personality in the Government and in the Popular Front.

The changes did not fail to occasion much discussion, some of it acrimonious. Of course the Right Press improved the shining hour by proclaiming that Léon Blum had been displaced because his experiment had not only definitely failed, but brought France to the brink of the abyss. But no one paid particular attention to

the vagaries of the opposition Press. Some other Press opinion, being less biassed and more moderate, carried greater weight.

The London *Times*, in its leader on June 24th on the change of government in France, besides certain remarks of a mildly amusing nature, put its finger on the cardinal difficulty of Blum's position:

"The fundamental weakness of M. Blum's position was that, as Prime Minister of a Front Populaire Government he was pledged to carry out a programme of social system, while, as a Socialist, he was convinced that effective reforms could only be secured by a drastic reconstitution."

Yet similar experiments have been partially successful elsewhere, notably in the Scandinavian States. It is too soon to hazard a prophecy whether it will succeed in France: the experiment is still in full swing. This much, however, may be said: that the difficulties in France have been considerably increased by the shortsightedness of the French possessing classes who do not realise that the present system, whatever its merits may have been at one time, has become unworkable and is fast crumbling to pieces and that their one hope of personal salvation is to lend themselves to an orderly evolution instead of mule-headedly waiting till they are washed away by the tidal wave of revolution.

This was the main but by no means the only trouble. The administration of which Léon Blum

was the head was no more exempt from errors than any other. The ministry had some weak spots which tenure of office revealed. The task of keeping an even keel between the various component parts of the Popular Front was no easy one. Some have criticised Blum for going too fast; others for not going fast enough. The truth is rather that the speed was irregular; in some directions fast, in others half speed. Financial reform did not keep pace with social reform. This does not imply that the financial administration was bad: only you cannot drive an automobile with rose water—it requires petrol. Unfortunately, some of the part owners of the automobile insisted on using the rose water of fiscal orthodoxy because they preferred its perfume to the stench of Socialistic petrol.

How far history will saddle Léon Blum for the responsibility for this anomaly is a moot point. Though not a technician of finance, he is too well versed an economist and too much of a political realist not to have perceived the dangers of this course of action. But he was the chief, not of a homogeneous ministry but of a coalition. In some questions he was the prisoner of a coalition. He hoped it might be possible as far as finance was concerned, to swim, as the French say, "*entre deux eaux*". And it is possible, nay even probable, that the attempt might have been successful had it not been for two factors. The first was that to which we have already referred: the political

blindness of the possessing classes who themselves created the atmosphere that was to stifle them. The second was the Government's dependence upon permanent officials who either could not or would not be content to remain instruments of policy, but tried to shape policy.

Léon Blum's directives in foreign policy were in every way admirable. But the interpretation of these directives was vitally and most unfavourably influenced by the "permanent official" atmosphere at the Quai d'Orsay.

In finance, the intentions of Vincent Auriol, approved by Blum, were practicable and—given the restricted freedom of action entailed by the coalition—sound. But their execution was left to high treasury officials who had their own, vastly different ideas on the subject.

Even the bitter rancour of a Caillaux would not have swung the Senate, had a document not been in the hands of the Senate's Finance Commission that condemned the cabinet's financial policy root and branch. And that document was signed by M. Rist and M. Baudoin, two of the three main permanent officials on whom the cabinet relied to carry out its financial policy.

Incidentally, it may not be amiss to clear up one point that has been greatly distorted in Press accounts of the fall of the Blum cabinet. It has been loudly trumpeted abroad that M. Bonnet, when he came back from Washington to succeed M. Vincent Auriol, found the treasury

empty save for the bagatelle of 20,000,000 francs (under 1,000,000 dollars, or about 190,000 pounds). In point of fact, on the day when Léon Blum resigned, the treasury had in hand 1,433,000,000 francs (about 65,000,000 dollars or 13,000,000 pounds); no great sum certainly, but one which hardly justifies the reproach that Blum dilapidated the financial reserves of the treasury. For on June 4th, 1936, when he took office, M. Vincent Auriol found only 10,000,000 francs in the treasury (at the then rate of exchange about 660,000 dollars or 132,000 pounds).

To return to the question of permanent officials. This and other minor faults one might pick here and there proved of mighty assistance to those who, some out of personal enmity, others out of sincere dread of Socialistic experiments, brought the Blum cabinet into the impasse out of which Léon Blum chose the egress of resignation.

This decision was the subject of much adverse comment, particularly among some of Blum's closest political friends. They would have preferred the heroic methods: blasts of war trumpets before the din of which the walls of the Senate might have collapsed as did those of Jericho long ago. Every instinct of the political fighter urged the expediency of such a course. Upper houses are never popular with the masses. From the viewpoint of democracy an excellent war-cry could be framed out of the interference of the Senate with the will of the Lower House elected by universal

suffrage. Especially so when the issue was one of finance, which in all parliamentary states is regarded as the particular preserve of the popularly elected chamber.

Léon Blum the party man, the Socialist, the Democrat, may have itched for battle on so splendid an issue. But Léon Blum the statesman took another view. The state of the national finances brooked no delay, and a fight with the Senate entailed delay. The international situation had reached a point of tension never equalled since 1914. To precipitate a constitutional crisis at such a juncture would have afforded the Fascist countries with an opportunity for mischief which they could not be expected to neglect. These seemed to Blum to be decisive considerations.

Yet it was with a heavy heart that he rose in the hastily convened National Council of the Socialist party to urge that the Socialists should return their swords to the scabbards, refrain from picking up the Senate's challenge and accept participation in a Chautemps ministry. Apart from the necessity for doing violence to his own fighting instincts, the case was a difficult one to present. The more so since Chautemps was entrusting the key ministry of Finance to Georges Bonnet, who though he bore and still bears a Radical label, was believed to be lukewarm in his allegiance to the Popular Front.

Greeted with a tremendous ovation, Blum first rose to speak at the morning session. He related in

detail the incidents of the past few days and outlined the reasons that had led to resignation. He closed by saying:

"We cannot refuse to participate in a Popular Front Government under Radical leadership for we must preserve intact the Popular Front majority.

"We must safeguard the social legislation we have passed.

"We must guard the past and prepare the future."

The speech, though in Blum's usual lucid and convincing style, did not at once carry the day. The blood of the rank and file was up. They were indignant at Blum for having been jockeyed out of the premiership. They were panting for a fight with the Senate.

A second intervention became necessary. Blum made it at the afternoon session.

"I know," he said, "that if you followed the dictates of your hearts, you would vote against the motion I moved this morning. I fully understand your state of mind, your anger, your righteous indignation. They afford evidence of the strong vitality of our party.

"But the events are there. The situation is there. It must be examined in cold blood."

Again, patiently, clearly, he analysed that situation. He argued that a "sacrifice was imperative, not only in the interests of France but in those of Socialism".

As he sat down, a trifle wearily and stroked his forehead, the delegates rose as one man and cheered him. It had been perhaps the toughest fight of his career; but he had won it.

Socialist participation was decided, though it was, most wisely, made contingent upon the Chautemps Government observing strictly and loyally the programme of the Popular Front; not only in the letter but in the spirit. Communist support was assured on the same conditions. So was that of the Trade Unions.

The experiment must continue.

The experiment is continuing; so far as social reforms are concerned it is in a state of suspense, but merely in order to set the financial house in order.

It was not the financial crisis that killed the Blum Government, but it supplied its open foes in the Opposition, its secret foes in the Senate, with a pretext to drive the Government into an impasse from which, in view of the international situation, there was no safe way out but to resign. And the financial crisis itself, as we have stressed, had to no mean extent been created by that *mur d'argent* that for years has tried to block the way of progress in France. When all is said and done, no Government dies of financial stress alone. There are things that are of even greater moment. As Léon Blum himself put it:

"Financial and currency crises are very important phenomena in themselves and owing to their

various repercussions, but they are less serious than war and peace, they are less serious than unemployment, or misery, or low salaries. Important though they be, they do not affect the depths of a nation's life."

The attitude of the French capitalist class towards Léon Blum and the experiment he directed can only be described as curious and unintelligent. Apart from a few professional lampooners of no importance, the men of the Right had for Léon Blum personally very considerable respect. None of them questioned either his integrity or his goodwill. They did not deny him intelligence or skill. But the fact that he was a Socialist aroused their passions, and they allowed their passions to get the better not only sometimes of their patriotism, but of their care for their own interests. Had they not been thus blinded they would have at least passively tolerated the one statesman who, loyal in spirit, disinterested in motives, abhors violence and seeks above all to bring about inevitable changes in an orderly and peaceful manner.

This lack of intelligence on the part of the French moneyed and employing class does not date from 1936; it had been manifest long before. French employers of Labour, speaking generally, have always closed their eyes to the signs of the times. Long after their brethren in America, in England and elsewhere had realised that concessions must be granted if the system was to be preserved, they refused to move one single inch. Their attitude

towards Léon Blum was of a piece with that general and probably incurable state of mind.

Perhaps it may have occurred to some of them—there are intelligent exceptions everywhere—that it might turn out to be an injudicious pastime to try to convince the determined champion of a legal revolution that a legal revolution is impossible in France. Not that this has necessarily been conclusively proved as yet, but it is an undoubted fact that the chances of a peaceful passage into the inevitable new order of things have been very much weakened.

If the day should come when hard facts will bring home to the French employers' class the blunder they have committed, they will not be able to claim that they were not warned. Léon Blum uttered the warning before he came into office. It was in May, 1906, at the National Congress of his party that he said:

"The question our experiment puts before the nation even more than before the party is how the change will be effected. The question is to know whether there is a possibility of the change being effected peaceably and amicably. The question is to know whether it is practicable, within our social system as it exists to-day, to obtain sufficient relief for the sufferers.

"But should it turn out that we shall have failed . . . I would be the first to come to you and tell you: it was an illusion, a vain dream; nothing can be done with existing society, nothing can

be expected from it; the resistance offered by selfishness, rooted conservatism and vested interests is unsurmountable. I would be the first to tell you how and why we shall have failed and what consequences we must draw from that failure."

APPENDIX

THE PEOPLE'S FRONT PROGRAMME

POLITICAL DEMANDS

I. Defence of Liberty

1. General amnesty.

2. Against the Fascist leagues:
   (*a*) Effective disarmament and dissolution of semi-military formations, in accordance with the law.
   (*b*) The putting into force of legal enactments in cases of incitement to murder or of attempts endangering the safety of the State.

3. The cleansing of public life, especially through the enforcement of parliamentary disqualifications (i.e. inability of a Deputy to hold certain offices).

4. The Press:
   (*a*) Repeal of the infamous laws and decrees restricting freedom of opinion.
   (*b*) Reform of the Press by the adoption of legislative measures:
      (i) Which will make possible the effective repression of slander and blackmail;
      (ii) Which will guarantee normal means of existence to journals, which will compel them to publish the source of their finance, which will end the private monopolies of

commercial publicity, and the scandals of financial publicity, and which, finally, will prevent the formation of a Press trust.

(*c*) The organisation of State broadcasting messages, with the aim of ensuring the accuracy of information and the equality of political and social organisations at the microphone.

5. Trade union liberties:

(*a*) Application and observance of trade union rights for all.

(*b*) Observance of factory legislation concerning women.

6. Education and freedom of conscience:

(*a*) To safeguard the development of public education, not only by the necessary grants, but also by reforms such as the extension of compulsory attendance at school up to the age of fourteen, and, in secondary education, the proper selection of pupils as an essential accompaniment of grants.

(*b*) To guarantee to all concerned, pupils and teachers, full freedom of conscience, particularly by ensuring the neutrality of education, its non-religious character, and the civic rights of the teaching staff.

7. Colonial territories: The setting up of a Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry into the political, economic, and cultural situation in France's overseas territories, especially in French North Africa and Indo-China.

II. Defence of Peace

1. Appeal to the people, and particularly to the working masses, for collaboration in the maintenance and organisation of peace.

2. International collaboration within the framework of the League of Nations for collective security, by defining the aggressor and the automatic and joint application of sanctions in cases of aggression.

3. A ceaseless endeavour to pass from armed peace to disarmed peace, first by a convention of limitation, and then by the general, simultaneous, and effectively controlled reduction of armaments.

4. Nationalisation of the war industries and suppression of private trade in arms.

5. Repudiation of secret diplomacy, international action, and public negotiations to bring back to Geneva the States which have left it, without weakening the constituent principles of the League of Nations: collective security and indivisible peace.

6. Simplification of the procedure provided in the League of Nations covenant for the pacific adjustment of treaties which are dangerous to the peace of the world.

7. Extension, especially in Eastern and Central Europe, of the system of pacts open to all nations, on the lines of the Franco-Soviet Pact.

ECONOMIC DEMANDS

I. Restoration of purchasing power destroyed or reduced by the crisis

Against unemployment and the crisis in industry

The establishment of a national unemployment fund.

Reduction of the working week without reduction of weekly wages.

Drawing young workers into employment by establishing a system of adequate pensions for aged workers.

The rapid carrying out of a scheme of large-scale works of public utility, both urban and rural, linking local savings with schemes financed by the State and municipalities.

Against the agricultural and commercial crisis

Revision of prices of agricultural produce, combined with a fight against speculation and high prices, so as to reduce the gap between wholesale and retail prices.

In order to put an end to the levies taken by speculators from both producers and consumers, the setting up of a National Grain Board representing all sections concerned.

Support for agricultural co-operatives, supply of fertilisers at cost prices by the National Boards for Nitrogen and Potash, control and certification

of sales of superphosphates and other fertilisers, extension of agricultural credits, reduction of leasehold rents.

Suspension of distraints and the regulation of debt repayments.

Pending the complete and earliest possible removal of all the injustices inflicted by the economy decrees, the immediate repeal of measures affecting those groups whose conditions of life have been most severely endangered by these decrees.

II. Against the robbery of savings and for a better organisation of credit

Regulation of banking business.

Regulation of balance sheets issued by banks and limited liability companies.

Further regulation of the powers of directors of companies.

Prohibition of State servants who have retired, or are on the reserve list, from being members of boards of directors of companies.

In order to remove credit and savings from the control of the economic oligarchy, to transform the *Banque de France*, now a privately owned Bank, into the *Banque de la France* (i.e. to nationalise it).

Abolition of the Council of Regents of the Bank of France.

Extension of the powers of the Governor of the Bank of France, under the permanent control of a council composed of representatives of the

legislative assembly, representatives of the executive authority, and representatives of the main organised forces of labour and of industrial, commercial, and agricultural activity.

Conversion of the capital of the bank into bonds, with measures to safeguard the interests of small holders.

III. Against Financial Corruption

Control of the trade in armaments, in conjunction with the nationalisation of war industries.

Abolition of waste in the civil and military departments.

The setting up of a War Pensions Fund.

Democratic reform of the tax system so as to relax the fiscal burden with a view to economic revival, and the finding of financial resources through measures directed against large fortunes (rapid steepening of the rates of tax on incomes of over 75,000 francs—reorganisation of death-duties—taxation of monopoly profits in such a way as to prevent any repercussion on the prices paid by consumers).

Prevention of fraud in connection with transferable securities.

Control of exports of capital, and punishment for evasion by the most rigorous measures, up to the confiscation of property concealed abroad or of its equivalent value in France.

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